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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of initial vocational education and training (VET) and support services in preparing early school leavers in Australia to negotiate an effective transition from school to adult roles was examined in a study that focused on two areas of the Central Coast of New South Wales. The following three data collection activities were used: literature review; assessment of recent commonwealth and state VET policies from a social policy perspective; and interviews with 40 early school leavers and samples of local providers of VET and social services and local businesses and employers. Two groups of early leavers were identified: "positive leavers," who are generally able to make the transition on their own, and "negative leavers," who require extensive assistance from school, parents, service providers, and/or VET. The overriding conclusion from the literature review and interviews was that integration of services to assist early school leavers in making the transition to work and adult life must be improved. (The report contains 52 references and 23 tables/figures. Appendixes, constituting approximately 40% of the document, contain the following: social policy perspective; leaver vignettes; school leaver interview schedule; employer interview schedule; provider interview; and Scandinavian countries' policies regarding safety nets for early leavers.) (MN)

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EARLY SCHOOL LEAVERS AT RISK

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Foreword

The efforts of many people contributed to this work on early school leavers carried out as part of the research program of the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training (RCVET) at the University of Technology, Sydney.

John Freeland and Marina Paxman developed the proposal which received funding support from the Research Advisory Council of the Australian National Training Authority. Marina completed the preparatory work for the field research, later carried on by Jacqui Stone. Although John left to become the Director of the Evatt Foundation, he continued to contribute to the project. Richard Sweet gave valuable guidance throughout the life of the project, which was supported by the Vocational Education and Training Directorate of the Department of School Education.

The report owes a great debt to the young adults on the Central Coast who gave their time to be interviewed about their experiences of early leaving. Their 'leaver stories' made an impact on the interviewers and we thank them for sharing these experiences and providing advice that needs to be heard by policy-makers and practitioners.

There were many people on the Central Coast who made the field work possible. We are grateful for the opportunity to link the research to the Central Coast Youth at Work project through the auspices of Richard Sweet of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the Central Coast Area Co-ordination Committee. We would particularly like to thank Lesley Tobin, whose expert local knowledge was invaluable in gaining access to school leavers and local organisations.

We thank the schools, colleges, community agencies and local businesses who made time to be interviewed. The Wyong CES and Wyong Campus, Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE kindly provided office accommodation for the interviews. The local office of the Department of School Education and the TAFE Commission respectively made statistics on school leaving and TAFE participation available.

We would like to acknowledge our debt to the work of Peter Dwyer at the Youth Policy Centre at the University of Melbourne, and also draw attention to the parallel regional studies conducted by colleagues at the Centre for Learning and Research in Rural and Regional Australia, University of Tasmania, and the Group for Research into Employment and Training, Charles Sturt University.

As always, the report is the labour of many hands, with contributions by Bernice Melville, John Freeland and Cristina Schwenke in addition to my own on the Central Coast and the early leaver interviews. The final chapter was a group contribution which included significant comment from Richard Sweet. Mez Egg brought her editorial skills to bear in giving coherence to the final report.

Finally, we thank Hugh Guthrie and the National Research and Evaluation Committee for their support of the project. The comments provided to us by the NCVER publication referee have also helpfully shaped the final publication, which we sincerely hope will go some way to bringing about better options for early school leavers in the VET system.

The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian National Training Authority.

John McIntyre
Director
Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training

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1 Overview

Vocational education and training (VET) should provide a vital link between school and work. However, for many early school leavers it does not. This represents a significant problem, because a failure to access initial vocational education and training systems can exacerbate the disadvantages of early school leavers, and increase the risk of their long-term dependence on the welfare system. Many early school leavers fall into the 'at-risk' group and fail to secure full-time employment in a competitive teenage labour market. In addition, they must often negotiate a path through a range of Commonwealth, State, local council and community institutions and services.

Recent research has shown that the teenage labour market has undergone major structural change since the mid-1960s. This includes a virtual collapse of full-time employment opportunities for 15–17 year olds (particularly for females), very significant increases in educational retention and participation rates, and concomitant increases in teenage part-time employment, particularly for full-time students. The research hypotheses are concerned with the complexity of youth labour markets and the social, economic and political changes which are reshaping our lives and society.

In response to these pressures and the effects of structural change, continuing reform of post-compulsory education and training is exerting a powerful transformative influence on VET. The changes include the introduction of competency-based training and assessment, increased emphasis on workplace learning, the introduction of vocational programs into schools and the piloting of the key competencies, and the development of the modifications of the entry-level training system including New Apprenticeships.

Yet it is a cause of serious concern that despite increased education and training participation rates, and despite the changes to general and vocational education, there still exists a significant group of teenagers who have been identified as 'at risk' in the transition from school to work. It has been estimated that some 15 per cent of 15–19 year olds fall into this category. The experiences of early school leavers are not generalisable: they do not constitute a homogenous group, and their experiences upon leaving school are variable. The circumstances that influence their decision to leave school prematurely include socio-economic status, Aboriginality, ethnicity, geographic location, parenthood, and familial situations. Furthermore, in all of these cases young females tend to be relatively more disadvantaged than their male peers.

Thus the key problem explored by this research *is whether initial vocational education and training and associated support services assist early school leavers to negotiate an effective transition from school to adult roles.*

This 'problem' is one which needs to be explored in several ways. It raises questions of which 'groups' of young people are at risk and what we mean by the transition to adult roles. It also invites us to assess to what extent youth services are being accessed by those school leavers most in need of them, and what kinds of changes are needed to improve these services so that they can facilitate young people to make their transition.

The problem also needs to be understood and researched with some understanding of the attempts of social policy to respond to the problem of youth transition. (Appendix 1 provides this policy perspective.)

Research on VET for young people

Access to VET could, and arguably should, bridge the transition from school to work, laying the foundations for secure employment, economic independence and active citizenship. School-to-work transition and youth labour markets have drawn significant attention and concern in the international arena with the rapid changes to patterns of employment due to the internationalisation of labour markets and economies. However, the place and role of VET and related services in the transition phase from school to work have not been adequately analysed.

A number of studies and research projects have addressed some of the issues identified in this project. The areas of research are:

- the actual VET programs and courses that are available to different population groups, including many which relate specifically to equity
- the availability of associated social welfare and community services for different population groups, including at-risk young people
- people's subjective experience of the VET and labour market programs
- longer-term school-to-work transition studies based on tracking a substantial database

However, these areas of research have tended to remain relatively discrete. What this project seeks to do is to bring together analysis of people's subjective experiences of VET and related services, in their transition from school to employment, with analysis of VET programs and related social welfare services. The gap between provision and demand for VET and associated services, and possible barriers to full access and utilisation of the available programs and services by 'at-risk' early school leavers, will be examined with a view to identifying policy and administrative changes which could improve access.

Given the rapid and extensive changes that have taken place in VET over the past decade, it is important to undertake research which achieves a special aim. This is to combine an understanding of the actual programs, courses and services as they exist in technical and further education (TAFE) institutes and in the community with an understanding of the extent to which those programs, courses and services are known about, how they are seen and how they are used by early school leavers. Only by bringing these together can we develop a more adequate understanding of the transition process and more adequate and effective programs, courses and services.

The potential benefits of the project are emphasised by the increased emphasis being placed on New Apprenticeships as the major vehicle for school-to-employment transition, and the reduction in availability of a number of labour market programs. The role of TAFE in New Apprenticeships and the pressure to provide for early school leavers could well increase. This project gives a valuable insight into the role VET plays in early school leavers' transition to employment and into how that role could be made more effective.

Research approach

Thus the aim of the project was to generate a multi-perspective understanding of the school-to-work transitions experienced by early school leavers in two areas of the Central Coast of New South Wales, with a particular emphasis on the role played by VET and VET providers in their transition.

In this study, documenting the experiences of early school leavers themselves is core to the research purposes, in particular gathering data from early school leavers about their experiences during the initial transition phase. These data are the touchstone for then examining information about the role of VET and associated services in the transition from school by early school leavers and to identify strategies to improve its accessibility and effectiveness for those young people.

The research thus aimed to contribute to the theoretical debate about, and understanding of, young people's transition from school to employment, and the role of VET in ensuring equity of access and provision for disadvantaged young people. This debate has led the research to make a number of key assumptions about the study in a number of ways:

- recognising the complexity of young people's transition to adult roles as they balance work and study as well as manage other aspects of life
- the need to examine the options for young people by understanding transition from their perspectives, as revealed through face-to-face interviews
- recognising that early leavers' options are, to some degree, set by where they live, so that the research is also a focussed regional study
- recognising that when young people exercise VET options they are influenced by a range of considerations including family, income support, employment, housing, health and other issues

The literature on young people suggests research needs to come to terms with *the complexity of their transition to adult roles*. This complexity is a reflection of different aspects of life that have to be negotiated. These include their experiences of schooling, their entry into the youth labour market, the attitudes and practices they encounter in job-seeking and employment, and the services available to help them deal with the difficulties they encounter in negotiating their adult identities. For this reason, the research highlights the perspectives of the early leavers revealed through face-to-face interviews.

It is also important that research recognises that these experiences are, in part, shaped by a given context. The young people live in a particular region of New South Wales, go to school, look for work and seek out vocational options in particular localities that are more or less limiting of those options.

It was the experience of the researchers that examining the complex factors which influence current practice and performance at the local level was the most effective way of learning more about how VET providers should respond to the needs of young people in transition. VET is not provided in a vacuum, but in context, and it is crucial in understanding young people's transition experiences to see VET courses in relation to other options they may exercise. It is also vital to understand how these options are influenced by such things as what courses are available, the nature of local employment, job-seeker services and so on. Strategies for the improved co-ordination and delivery of initial VET services need to be proposed in this light. Similarly, it is a false reading of young people's situations to think that the provision of VET services can disregard their needs for income support, accommodation, counselling, health and other information.

Thus the research addressed a number of research questions:

- What are the circumstances, characteristics and aspirations of the early school leavers on the Central Coast?
- What are the transition experiences of early school leavers at risk within the first 12 months of their exit from school? How do these reflect the nature of VET and employment opportunities for teenagers in the study area?
- What are the linkages between the programs and services in the area, in terms of co-ordination, accessibility, flexibility, retention rates and outcomes? Where are the gaps and overlaps in service provision?
- Do the VET services in the two areas match the needs and opportunities in these areas? And how far has the reform of VET had an effect on the services for young people?
- What reforms and changes might be considered, from broad policy formation to local service delivery, to meet more adequately the VET and transitional needs of this target group?

A regional study also makes it possible to see how national and State policies are worked out at the local level. This point is crucial to understanding how policy can make a difference and contribute to a more inclusive, cohesive and fair society. By focussing on the local level, it is possible to gain some ideas of how well services for young people are co-ordinated.

The research was oriented toward the development of theoretical understandings of the transition process for 'at-risk' young people, and of the role of VET in the transition of young people from school to employment. It especially aimed to contribute to a greater understanding of the issues facing equity of access and provision for disadvantaged young people.

Project collaboration

In April 1997, an opportunity arose to develop collaboration with the Central Coast Youth at Work project being conducted by Richard Sweet of the Dusseldorp Skills Forum and the Central Coast Area Co-ordination Committee. Their project was investigating the extent of support services available to young people at a local and regional level. It focussed on improving the employment, education and training options for young people living in the Gosford and Wyong local government areas (LGAs) by developing a range of strategies. These include small business mentoring, a post-school destination survey, structured work placements, community service awards, supervisor training, career education, youth mentoring and 'breaking the cycle' programs (Teese et al. 1997).

Aligning the two studies had a number of benefits, mainly that collaboration would result in a deeper and richer regional study of early school leavers in Australia than either study could alone produce. The Early Leaver at Risk project was assisted by gaining access to resources and local information and expertise (e.g. databases). There were a number of further modifications of the study resulting from this change:

- adding a fieldwork component focussing on the perspective of local businesses and employers
- dividing the sample of early school leavers into two groups, in order to compare the experiences of those who make a successful transition from school to work/training and those who do not
- expanding the study area to include the whole Central Coast by adding the Wyong LGA to the Gosford LGA, and not going ahead with the inner-west Marrickville LGA

Research procedures

The methodology used in the research considered the impact of VET, associated services and policy on young people making the transition from school to work. The research comprised a diversity of approaches, in contrast to most similar studies which have concentrated on one level of analysis or a single methodological approach.

- A review of selected literature (chapter 2) grounded the research in a theoretical, historical and policy context.
- A social policy perspective (appendix 1) examined the recent history of Commonwealth and State initial VET policies and programs for young people leaving school.
- An analysis was conducted of the Central Coast region using 1996 census data and TAFE participation patterns and labour market conditions facing teenagers in Gosford and Wyong LGAs. The analysis provided a social and economic context for the empirical study.
- Interviews were conducted with early school leavers. A sample of 40 young people were interviewed, who had left school in Year 11 before completing their high school certificate (HSC), and lived in the Gosford and Wyong LGAs. One group of 20 consisted of early school leavers who have not accessed employment and/or training within the 6–12 months since leaving school. The other was a comparison group consisting of 20 young people who had successfully gained employment and/or training within the 6–12 months since leaving school. The early school leavers were contacted and invited to participate with the co-operation and assistance of staff involved in the relevant areas. These included TAFE, labour market programs (LMPs)/ New Apprenticeships programs and refuges. Advice was also provided by school principals with the assistance of the Department of School Education (DSE).
- Telephone interviews were conducted in order to generate data about co-ordination issues. These were held with local service providers including VET workers, school career counsellors, and officers from the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES), youth access centres (YACS), the Department of Social Security (DSS) and the Department of Community Services (DOCS). In addition, interviews were conducted with refuge workers and other relevant professionals operating in the Gosford and Wyong LGAs. Issues arising

from the interviews with the young people were discussed from the service provider perspective. It was also an opportunity to assess the perceived impact, positive or negative, of the VET reforms as identified by practitioners.

- Telephone interviews with local businesses and employers were used to generate knowledge about their perspective on issues concerning services, training and employment for early school leavers. The data looked at the extent of knowledge held by the business sector about local services, the closeness of links with schools, the needs of employers, problems and experiences in the local area.

Throughout this report the term 'VET' is used to include the full range of employment-oriented, education/training-based transition programs and services available to early school leavers.

2 The concept of youth 'at risk'

Contemporary social policy tends to define young people as entering a world that presents as many threats as it offers opportunities, particularly in regard to employment. Young people, some more than others, are commonly referred to as being 'at risk' of being beset by difficulties and disadvantages to a degree that some may fail to achieve a successful transition to adult roles in the society.

It is necessary to examine this concept of youth 'at risk', exploring the recent literature from 1990 with some references to earlier work in order to provide historical perspective. This review provides a broad theoretical, historical and social background to the research questions and is not intended to be comprehensive. Some areas would warrant a full study in their own right; for example, the current debate on the development of appropriate and comprehensive school curriculum in relation to vocational training.

The research literature also needs to be read in relation to an understanding of the attempts of social policy to grapple with the 'problem' of youth transition in recent history. Appendix 1 provides this policy perspective.

The literature reviewed relates to issues such as:

- the concept of early school leavers at risk
- who leaves school early and why
- characteristics of early school leavers
- services provided to early school leavers at the point of leaving school
- models of intervention
- experience and outcomes of early school leavers
- the labour market and young people
- employment entry
- employer perspectives
- training and apprenticeships
- employment patterns of early school leavers
- young people and TAFE
- the relationship between early school leaving and social disadvantage

Context

The New South Wales Government circulated the New South Wales's *Charter for equity in education and training* (1997). The Charter's preamble includes the statement: 'We aim to improve overall education and training outcomes by focussing on those learners and groups of learners who are not benefitting fully from education and training'. The Charter states:

> *Everyone is entitled to high quality education and training programs that provide recognised credentials and clear pathways to employment and lifelong learning. The outcomes of education and training should not depend on factors beyond the learner's control or influence. All young people are entitled as a minimum, to be able to complete their school education to Year 12 or a vocational education equivalent.*

What is clear from the literature is that there are young people who do not 'complete their education to Year 12' and who do not receive 'recognised credentials and clear pathways' and whose outcomes appear to be very dependent on some 'factors beyond the learner's control or influence'.

The Sydney Morning Herald (Stephens 1997) quoted Mr Brian Burdekin, Chair of the Australian Youth Foundation, as saying *'Unemployed young people are missing out on an essential rite of passage between adolescence and adulthood'* (emphasis added), 'bringing individual tragedy and threatening national disaster'. It continued:

> *There is a very real danger that we are so obsessed by economic indicators that we are losing the plot ... Young people think we as a society have given up on their right to have a job.* (Stephens 1997)

Who are these 'young people'? The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines the youth population as 15–24 year olds with the teenage population being a subgroup of 15–19 year olds (DTEC 1996a). Early school leavers, the focus of the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training (RCVET), while part of the youth population are more specifically part of the teenage subgroup.

Early school leavers 'at risk'

This current study adopts the definition of early school leavers as those who leave school before completing Year 12 (from Batten & Russeli 1995; Dwyer et al. 1990) thus putting them 'at risk'. Our definition of 'at risk' is that of not making a successful transition from school into adult life through work and study.

Other definitions (or uses) may differ. Batten and Russell identified the most commonly used definition of 'at risk' as the one embodied within the Australian National Equity Program for Schools; that is, 'students "most at risk" of not completing secondary school', i.e. leaving school before completion of Year 12. Yet others, for example the Helping Early Leavers Program (HELP) conducted by the New South Wales Government, defined early school leavers at risk as those who leave school before Year 10 (Brooks, Johansson & Hart 1995).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development defines pupils 'at risk' as 'children up to the age of 19' who intend to leave school or have already left, and whose level of educational achievement is affected by specific problems (OECD 1996, pp.191–192). (The

OECD cites the Australian Students at Risk [STAR] component of the Federal National Equity Program for Schools [NEPS].) They may be 'at risk' of failing in school and have problems such as family breakdown, parental violence, transience, homelessness, substance abuse and truancy. A question which then arises in relation to these factors is to consider which comes first—the factors mentioned or the unsuccessful passage through school to employment and/or study. Were they 'at risk' before they entered secondary school?

Thus there is a considerable dilemma related to using the term 'at risk'.

> *The term 'at risk' has entered common parlance in reference to young people in recent years. In general it is used to describe or identify young people who, beset by particular difficulties and disadvantages, are thought likely to fail to achieve the development in their adolescent years that would provide a sound basis for a satisfying and fulfilling adult life.* (Batten & Russell 1995, p.1)

Another definition of 'at risk' is used by welfare professionals as referring to people as 'at risk of homelessness' (ACEE 1996, p.15). 'At riskness' in this sense takes into account whether the young person is living at home with both parents, in a blended family or with a sole parent. However, young people can be out of home but may not be 'at risk'. Relationships and the school experience are also taken into account. A further definition from Youth Studies Australia is:

> *...where life circumstances threaten physical, psychological or emotional well being and preclude or limit the normative developmental experiences necessary to achieve adult and healthy functioning.* (Colthart 1996, p.31)

Wyn & Holden (1994, p.1) describe the concept 'at risk' as serving as shorthand for the systematic process whereby some groups of young people are consistently disadvantaged by their outcomes from schooling. The outcomes usually result from the interweaving factors of gender, ethnicity, class and race. The many risk factors identified in the literature tend not to operate in isolation but rather to cluster and subsequently work in combination, or work in a chain over a period of time (Batten & Russell 1995).

Thus, the term 'at risk' has taken on something of a 'buzz word' quality with the multiplicity of uses tending to blur the concept in people's minds. It is considered beyond the scope of this review and study to propose a definitive answer as to what 'at riskness' is; rather, the review has set out to highlight the diversity in usage of the term. Therefore, our working definition of 'at risk' for the purposes of the study is that of being at risk of *'not making a successful transition from school into a successful adult life through work and study'*.

Who leaves school early and why?

School leavers include those who *make a positive choice* to take up an alternative career path and who may need some placement assistance but are less likely to be at risk, and *opportune leavers* who don't fit the former but take an opportunity not to stay at school when an alternative arises (Dwyer et al. 1990; Dwyer & the YRC 1996). In the short term those in the latter group tend not to need assistance but in the medium to long term may need referral assistance on a second-chance basis. Other groups are *would-be leavers* who are continuing at school but would prefer to leave and who may well respond to flexible curriculum, and *circumstantial leavers* who are forced out of school for other than educational reasons such as low family income. This group could benefit from flexible attendance patterns which may make way for a part-time job. The remaining groups identified are the *discouraged leavers* who are discouraged by their educational experience and may need a supportive 'second-chance' opportunity, and *alienated leavers* for whom positive post-school experiences are crucial.

Dwyer et al. (1990) also found that the vast majority of 'early school leavers' in Victoria came from a government school background and had completed at least ten years of schooling. They also found that more young men than young women had left school early, country students had a higher rate of early school leaving and young Koori people continued to be the most disadvantaged school leavers in Victoria. While family expectations had declined as a major factor in early school leaving since the mid-1980s, residential insecurity—especially homelessness—and low income were major contributing factors to early school leaving.

The OECD cites the Burdekin Report (1989) which states that in Australia, family conflict, family fragmentation and family dislocation are major causes of youth homelessness which, in turn, is associated with educational under-achievement and early school leaving (OECD 1996, p.19).

Between the early 1980s (33%) and the 1990s (80%) there was a marked increase in the proportion of young people completing Year 12. However, there are still groups of young people who are very unlikely to do so (Lamb, Polesel & Teese 1995). Students from government and Catholic schools are less likely than those from private schools to complete Year 12 and country students are less likely than their city counterparts to complete secondary schooling. Completion rates for female students had begun to rise in the mid-1980s but have now begun to weaken. In the past, high economic status of parents has been a factor in school completion but this is changing.

Dwyer and the Youth Research Centre (1996) identified that young people in the following circumstances are most vulnerable in relation to non-completion of school:

- isolated children from low-income families
- Aboriginal students
- country region students
- truants and homeless youth

Batten and Russell (1995) listed the following factors as indicators of potential school leaving in Australia:

- stated intention to leave early
- truancy (especially if it began early and becomes chronic), absence from classes, habitual lateness, school refusal/phobia)
- homelessness
- lack of interest in schooling, low valuing of school completion
- alienation from school, dislike or loathing of teachers and authority figures, anger, resentment and hopelessness about school
- poor academic performance, poor work habits, failure to complete work or do homework

- disruptive behaviour in class, often in trouble at school, lack of participation/co-operation, aggression, conflicts with peers, gang behaviour and hanging out with a wild crowd, vandalism and graffiti, frequent suspension, expulsion from individual schools
- passivity, quiet and withdrawn in class
- frequent changes of school
- feelings of school not being supportive, lack of family support
- enrolled in default of a job, desire to pursue a practical course/career lack of interest in obtaining a satisfying full-time job
- drug and alcohol use/abuse, unsafe sexual practices, self-injury
- social isolation
- pregnancy and motherhood
- lack of language competence
- extremely poor self-image, and low self-esteem

The characteristics of early school leavers

The Research Report of the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (Lamb 1997, p.v; Lamb, Polesel & Teese 1995) found that lower achievers in relation to numeracy and literacy skills had a higher chance of leaving school early—less than 50 per cent of boys with poor literacy skills complete secondary school. Generally, girls are more likely to complete school; however, girls with weak numeracy skills are more at risk of early leaving than those with weak literacy skills. Although the likelihood of completing Year 12 is affected by parents' socio-economic status, currently higher numbers of students (more females than males) with fathers of lower socio-economic background are completing school (Lamb, Polesel & Teese 1995). Other factors are the type of school attended and the language background.

Walker (in White [ed.] 1993) discusses the effects of youth culture in relation to academic performance. Young people, particularly boys, feel under pressure from youth subcultures to rebel against perceived control. As an example of perceived control, 'help and guidance' offered by parents can be perceived as 'control' by the young person at school.

While data collected on Norwegian youth show that as in other countries, low levels of education give rise to the risk of unemployment, Hammer (1997) argues that it may be labour market structures rather than low educational levels that lead to a higher risk of recurrent unemployment. On a different level, adjustment to school, he argues, may be an even better measure. Avoiding dropping out of school in spite of difficulties may be related to personality factors required for enduring in and adjusting to a steady job.

Services provided to early school leavers at the point of leaving school

Needs, career advice and information

Youth 'at risk' have specific needs. Withers and Batten (1995) cite two reports: firstly, El-Amin's report in 1992 into basic 'needs' for at-risk young people and, secondly, the Carnegie Corporation Working Party findings (also in 1992) in which 'opportunities' needed by at-risk youth were identified. As described by El-Amin, the needs of at-risk young people are for belonging, for recognition, for validation, to establish a sense of purpose, to establish a sense of importance, to establish a sense of achievement, and the need to establish long-term programs and to progress. The Carnegie 'opportunities' are to socialise with peers and adults, to develop skills relevant now and later, to contribute to the community, to belong to a valued group, and the opportunity to feel competent.

In Australia, Wyn and Holden found in their study *Early school leavers: Young women and girls at risk* (1994, p.31) that young men and women alike had difficulty in finding a consistent pathway from school to work to help them achieve their goals. Some young people had little information and have been denied access to available training and educational programs because they were not registered with the then CES. They were not registered because they did not view themselves as being 'unemployed' but rather as 'looking for work', 'a small but significant distinction in their eyes' (Holden 1992, p.6). No matter which pathway young people take they will be in need of support in relation to their accommodation, employment, welfare and legal rights and responsibilities, financial planning and personal relationships (Holden 1992, pp.36–37). Holden found, however, that young people were either unaware of, unhappy about, or reluctant to use the available public support services.

In Sweden the pattern for early school leavers appears to be very different (Sweet 1995b, p.25). Swedish schools are obliged to take responsibility for all young people up to the age of 18, including those who have left school. A personal plan is drawn up for each young person not in full-time education or full-time work. Each plan must include elements of counselling, education, and work and is reviewed with the young person every ten weeks. During the period, possibilities for transition into regular education or permanent work must be examined (see also appendix 6).

Sweet (1995b, p.26), while recognising the elements of a more integrated approach now in place in Australia, argues that there is also potential for further integration of services to ease the fragmented and interrupted transitions experienced by some of our youth.

Further integration could be achieved by:

- monitoring by schools of what happens to their students when they leave
- having a post-school entitlement expressed in a personal plan for a 12-month period which can be 'cashed in' in a variety of employment and learning settings
- having local community employment and learning managers
- developing learning agreements for young people in work
- having clearly defined and agreed standards of general education which need to be achieved

- weaving key generic workplace competencies into the young person's learning
- having learning methods which include mentoring, group and individual investigation, continuous and flexible assessment methods
- having mechanisms to record learning which has been done independent of the job together with a certification process

These initiatives might, in turn, not only assist the young person but may better suit the changing needs of employers.

Education and training

In relation to on-the-job training for young people who have not yet left school, Sweet (1995a) argues strongly for the need for schools to support, assist and liaise with industry in their role as co-educators. He also believes that staff delivering on-the-job training should be well-briefed and well-trained in the requirements. An observation has been made (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 1998) that while there has been a rapid growth in school–industry programs during the 1990s, the time spent in the workplace is usually brief. Sweet summarises by saying that 'creating effective learning opportunities for students through workplace learning programs is not just a matter of the industry horse pulling the educational cart'.

Most young people in a study by Holden in 1992 were not prepared to undertake further education as a post-school option. Of the young people in this study, the only participants who took up further education immediately upon leaving school were a small group of Kooris who enrolled in a job skills development program.

Job-seeking assistance

At the time of the study the federally funded programs available to early school leavers for training for employment were:

- the Training for Employment Program (TEP), for which applicants were required to be registered with the CES as unemployed for at least 12 months or be in a case management plan
- SkillShare, for which applicants must have been unemployed for 12 months or be in, or have completed, a case management plan or be under 21 years of age
- Job Seeking Preparation and Support (JPS), Job Search Assistance (JSA), Preparatory Training and Assistance (PTA) and assessment services and interpreter services were available for those who are eligible (DEETYA 1996, pp.96–102)

Support services

Holden found that:

> *... the overall lack of information (access to it) and support received by young people in the study have had clear implications for their ability to recognise and access the existing options.* (Holden 1992, p.43)

Young people's perceptions of support service provision were mostly concerned with specific practices of particular service providers (Holden 1993, p.5). The general issues most important to young service users were providers offering an individual approach, having respect for the person, being selective and offering an appropriate level of information. Young people also identified a number of issues as being important (Holden 1993, pp.9–10). These included gender bias (in the locations of centres and staffing), cultural appropriateness, confidentiality (particularly in small communities) and sympathetic treatment (for most it was their first experience with a large organisation). Other important issues included access (both physical and psychological) and a sensitivity in relation to the negative welfare image sometimes attributed to those who access the services.

The young people in this study identified almost 70 services which they had used (p.7). These could be grouped in order of usage into health (accessed least), accommodation, other (sporting, leisure, recreation and personal interest), general welfare, employment and training, legal, education, and support services such as the Department of Social Security as it was then structured and the now defunct Commonwealth Employment Service offices (which were accessed most).

Services required to increase the opportunities for young people fall into two areas—school-based interventions and post-school initiatives (Sweet 1995a; Dwyer et al. 1990). Post-school initiatives include income support, individual referral, apprenticeships/traineeships (particularly traineeships for young rural women), second-chance programs (re-entry training), local community schemes, peer grouping, and monitored assistance (personal tutor/companions for individuals) (Dwyer et al. 1990).

Income support

> *Austudy provides help to disadvantaged students who are 16 years of age or over and whose family financial circumstances are such that without financial help, full-time study would not be possible.* (DEETYA 1997b)

In some cases travel assistance and ancillary assistance were available for those eligible for training programs and a benefit was also available for isolated and homeless young people through the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme and the Student Homeless Rate.

Currently, Austudy, CES and the DSS, as they were known, are now being administered from under the same roof (shop-front operations) now known as Centrelink. The Youth Allowance is a combined youth allowance package including unemployed Job Search Allowance, Newstart Allowance, Young Homeless Allowance and Youth Training and Educational Allowances. This was seen as a move whereby the stigma and discrimination in relation to unemployment could be reduced.

In her Victorian study, Holden (1993) found that a small but significant aspect of the options for participants in the study was to be involved in illegal activities (p.20). All of the young people who participated in illegal activities for financial gain were young men and this participation was seen as a replacement for, or supplement to, inadequate levels of income support. Most of the young people who were involved in illegal activities post school chose to do so because of previous involvement in similar activities while still at school. For some, post-school illegal activity was seen as the most feasible option.

Other support systems

Support for marginalised young people has been developed in some areas by way of counter-culture programs. These include Operation A conducted in the early 1990s in Canberra (Walker in White [ed.] 1993) and a program for young marginalised disabled people (Slee & Cook in White [ed.] 1993).

The Australian Student Traineeship Foundation (ASTF) Guide to VET was produced by the ASTF to help school–industry co-ordinators find information on vocational education and training and on the role of school–industry programs for young people (Curtain 1997). This guide goes some way towards increasing the awareness of programs and services available to young people.

Models of intervention

Batten and Russell (1995) found that international programs were more likely than Australian programs to be participant designed, organised and driven, (the participants being at-risk youth). Australian programs, by comparison, were much more top-down oriented and institution driven (p.vii).

The Australian Consortium on Experiential Education (ACEE 1996) reported on different models of early intervention in the lives of at-risk homeless students within the concept of full-service schools. Some programs were integrated into a particular school, others operated outside any one particular school but provided support within a number of schools but in different ways.

> *The relationship with the school is emerging as a key factor in the ability of the project to be effective ... similarly the skills of the project workers and the commitment of the management committee are important.* (ACEE 1996, p.65)

A full evaluation of the programs described was to be available at a later date. OECD reported that involving education systems in integrated services had its difficulties (1996, p.27). These include the necessity for policy changes by governments which address disadvantage from pre-school level to the facilitation of co-ordinated services in schools. For some, the idea of services 'integration' implies too strong an interaction between the agencies involved (p.34). Barriers emerge from the implications from the terminology used. Terms such as co-ordination and collaboration are preferred.

Nevertheless the results of the OECD 1996 study, *Successful services for our children and families at risk,* indicated that in general terms an integrated service provision is the preferred option. In brief, administrators value the economies, and professionals value an improved service and heightened job satisfaction with less stress. While one of the examples cited by the OECD—the then youth access centres in Australia—was reported as being very successful, some difficulties were experienced relating to the need to provide better service delivery to meet increased problems faced by disadvantaged youth. Advantages of such centres included the strengthening of links between youth service organisations and the identification of duplication of services.

The involvement of industry in school courses is another model of school-based intervention. These were seen as interventions in the area of employment rather than in homelessness. Successful programs include the Training in Retail and Commerce (TRAC) program and the industry studies and content-endorsed courses (DTEC 1996a, pp.7–8; Sweet 1995a).

The experience and outcomes of early school leavers

While school retention rates have doubled over the last decade, the labour market for young people has also changed sharply (Sweet 1995b). Early school leavers find themselves in a climate in which the chances of a teenager who is not in full-time education not being in full-time work have risen to something like one in two in the mid-1990s. At the same time, full-time work with one employer seems to be the exception rather than the rule and young people are finding themselves marginalised from mainstream employment, education and training.

In 1995, Sweet found that with such large numbers of unemployed marginalised youth taking part in labour market programs:

> *... they must be far more consciously and deliberately incorporated into analysis and discussion of school-to-work policies and into policies and programs for initial vocational preparation.* (Sweet 1995b)

Sweet argues for the integration of learning and experience (from multiple settings) under a protective umbrella so that these otherwise fragmented experiences might appear as a 'coherent whole'. He also argues that issues related to the current labour market can be addressed, in part, by 'ensuring that all young people, regardless of their academic achievement, are effectively connected to the labour market before they leave school' (p.7).

There is considerable after-school 'milling and churning' in a context of casual and part-time work, broken full-time work, working for more than one employer over a period of any one year and periods of searching for work. Unconnected and disconnected young people are vulnerable and there is evidence that the level of vulnerability is increasing.

Dwyer et al. (1990) identified the following groups as having particularly low employment opportunities:

- those with poor literacy/numeracy skills
- young women, especially in country areas
- homeless youth
- the six-month unemployed

Larger companies are more likely, and small companies less likely, to employ young people (DTEC 1996a). In New South Wales, 96 per cent of all enterprises are small businesses which raises serious questions in relation to the future of youth employment in that State.

Dwyer et al. (1990) found that although many young people stayed at school until Year 12 and gained part-time employment during that time, the link between school and work was not direct. Teenagers found employment in a narrow range of occupations often requiring little skill and offering little potential for career prospects. Young women gained employment in an even narrower range of occupations than young men. The youth wage ensured that a proportion of young workers lived below the poverty line, particularly those who did not have family support. Youth living away from the family home payed standard prices for accommodation, food and services but had to meet such financial obligations on a youth wage.

Four years later Wyn and Holden's (1994) study looked at the experiences of female early school leavers. The conclusions were that while the young women tended to achieve their aspirations, these aspirations were limited to occupations where job security and career opportunities do not exist such as in casual and part-time retail and services. The complex set of factors operating in the experience of these young women includes the desire to maintain independence from their families, greater dependence on income support, and the tendency for using health and education services less than males.

This complexity makes returning to school or pursuing higher education difficult. It would seem that when discussing pathways it is inappropriate to consider employment, education and training in isolation from other aspects of their lives such as family, and place of residence, and accompanying responsibilities. The diversity dictates that many approaches are needed to address the inequity in the 'at-risk' status for young female school leavers.

Both males and females in this study found school re-entry difficult and that there was exploitation in the workplace. Employment seldom offered the secure, long-term and interesting jobs they would have liked. Accommodation was an ever-present problem for many and almost all were reliant on income support at one time or another. A large number of the young people accessed health and education services with only 12 per cent not accessing any. Males tended to use the services sooner than females (pp.30–31).

The labour market and young people

Many early school leavers fall into the 'at-risk' group and fail to secure full-time employment in a competitive teenage labour market. In addition, they must often negotiate a path through a range of Commonwealth, State, local council and community institutions and services.

Freeland's (1991) extensive analysis of labour force and education participation for the Finn Committee showed that:

- in August 1966, 58 per cent of 15–19 year olds held a full-time job, but by 1990 this figure had fallen to 28 per cent
- up until early 1974 increased school retention contributed significantly to the decline in unemployment, but after the recessions in the 1970s and 1980s came increases in teenage unemployment and rises in school retention rates
- all governments developed policies to further increase retention rates
- in 1989 non-Catholic private schools had the highest retention rates to Year 12 at 97.9 per cent, government schools had a rate of 54.3 per cent, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders had the lowest rate at 29.7 per cent
- young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) are not homogeneous in their 'at riskness' in the transition to adulthood—the results are highly varied—and some ethnic groups in particular are more at risk as are recent arrivals
- for NESB students higher participation and retention rates at school do not translate into a stronger position in the labour market
- some young people in rural areas where unemployment is high (and particularly Kooris) perceive that there is no point to staying on at school

Research (Freeland & Cass, cited in Freeland 1991) has shown that the teenage labour market has undergone major structural change since the mid-1960s. This includes a virtual collapse of full-time employment opportunities for 15–17 year olds (particularly for females), very significant increases in educational retention and participation rates, and concomitant increases in teenage part-time employment, particularly for full-time students.

In response to these pressures and the effects of structural change, VET is being transformed through the continuing reform of post-compulsory education and training. The changes include the introduction of competency-based training and assessment, increased emphasis on workplace learning, the introduction of vocational programs into schools and the piloting of the key competencies, and the development of the modifications of the entry-level training system including New Apprenticeships.

Yet, despite increased education and training participation rates, and despite the changes to general and vocational education, there still exists a significant group of teenagers who have been identified as 'at risk' in the transition from school to work. It has been estimated that some 15 per cent of 15–19 year olds fall into this category. The experiences of early school leavers are not generalisable: they do not constitute a homogenous group, and their experiences upon leaving school are varied.

As mentioned earlier in this review Hammer (1997), in his study on Norwegian youth, argues that it may be labour market structures rather than low educational levels that lead to a higher risk of recurrent unemployment.

Employment entry

How do young people enter employment? Many young people rely on friends and relatives to gain entry into the workforce. However, although Carson (1989) concluded that the use of social networks can speed up job-finding, it can be at the expense of job satisfaction and security, contrary to what might be termed 'conventional wisdom'.

In relation to enhancing employment opportunities in Australia, Lamb, Polesel and Teese (1995) state that when comparisons are made between early school leavers and school completers, it appears that in terms of avoiding unemployment there are clear benefits in completing Year 12 (p.20*)*. Staying at school also had benefits in relation to the types of jobs entered. It was shown that while early school-leaving females are more likely to take up apprenticeships, school completers are more likely to enter clerical positions. In the ranks of young males, more school completers went into white-collar positions and were less likely than early leavers to be employed in labouring and other manual work (p.22). Lamb (1997, p.19) showed that those who made the most successful transitions were those with no periods of unemployment, those who, at age 14 had above-average reading and numeracy skills, those who had attended non-government schools and those from higher socio-economic origins.

Buchanan (in White [ed.] 1993) states independent adulthood is seen as the young adult having achieved full-time employment which enables independence from family or other support—the essential rite of passage (Burdekin in Stephens 1997). Buchanan points to the lack of sense of identity among young adolescent women and argues that, for them, transition to independent adulthood is particularly complex. There is no single model of transition. Complexity arises out of individual identities which might include being Aboriginal, non-English speaking, working class, lesbian, physically isolated and disabled as well as being female (p.63). In addition, much of the employment available to young women is either part time and/or casual.

The following groups were identified by Dwyer et al. (1990) as having low employment opportunities—those with poor literacy/numeracy skills, young women (especially in country regions), homeless youth and the six-month unemployed (p.18). Holden's 1992 study of disaffiliated school leavers found that less than half of the group in the study were employed immediately on leaving school. Findings in relation to those who entered employment were that:

- few young people left school specifically to go into employment—for most it was to put as much distance as possible between themselves and school
- nearly equal percentages of males and females were employed immediately on leaving school
- most of the females were employed in sales-related jobs, while the males were employed in unskilled positions
- similar percentages of young people from English and non-English-speaking backgrounds went into employment
- the majority went into full-time positions, but relatively few were in permanent positions
- young Koori people were less likely to find employment both immediately after school and later
- the geographical location was a factor in the likelihood of finding employment immediately on leaving school
- on average, females received lower incomes, worked fewer hours per week and were employed for shorter lengths of time than males
- young people who experienced employment-related problems tended not to make use of labour equity services
- the rate of employment did not change substantially over the two to three years of the study

In a paper presented at a National Issues Forum (RCVET 1997), Dwyer argues that there is a 'mismatch between conventional models of youth transitions and young people's own options and outcomes' (p.17). He describes this mismatch as being between what young people themselves are making of their lives and what policy-makers assume they are, or should be, doing with their lives. The reality for school non-completers was that attempts at re-entry to study either at school or at TAFE were very rarely successful (p.20). In reality, the majority moved in and out of jobs, zigzagging through up to 14 to 15 changes of jobs, using welfare and family support, and not following the perceived linear pathway (Dwyer 1997; Dwyer & Wyn 1997).

However, Dwyer does point out that this pattern of moving in and out of jobs and study is not unique to non-completers. The Youth Research Centre (YRC) developed a five-fold typology to describe the ways young school completers approach their lives (Dwyer & the YRC 1996, p.21):

- (V)ocational focus—they focus on gaining qualifications to enable a career choice to be made
- (O)ccupational focus—they give priority to work, with other life-choices subordinate to that
- (C)ontextual focus—they choose a 'life' context (family, community, lifestyle, 'field' of work)
- (A)ltered patterns—they reconsider their original route and change to another destination
- (M)ixed patterns—they place equal value or emphasis on a *range* of activities or goals

In addition, it was found that many young school completers modify their options after finishing school.

Employer perspectives

On the employers' side of the equation, the Youth Employment Survey of 500 employers of young people under 21 found that the employers showed an 'overwhelming preference' for potential entry-level employees who displayed enthusiasm and a desire to work (DTEC 1996a, p.1). Wage rates and subsidies were ranked lowest in the choice of significant recruitment factors. The study also found that more businesses (46%) in non-metropolitan areas were likely to employ trainees or apprentices than in metropolitan areas (37%) and that 28 per cent of employers who do not employ apprentices or trainees would not do so under any circumstance.

Generally (NBEET 1995, pp.22–23) employers rate communication skills (listening and speaking, reading and writing) equally high for school, TAFE and university graduates, but the ability to follow instructions is considered more important for school and TAFE college graduates. Problem-solving, creativity/initiative, leadership and independent work are considered less important for school graduates, while teamwork and interpersonal skills are considered equally important for university and TAFE college graduates but less important for graduates from school. This clearly reflects the employment of school graduates in less skilful work.

Similarly to the findings of the Department of Training and Education Coordination study (DTEC 1996a), energy, enthusiasm and willingness to learn were considered to be major strengths of school leavers while technical skills and work environment knowledge are considered to be the strengths of TAFE graduates (NBEET 1995). As an example of industry attitudes and practices in recruitment and employment, some companies within the New South Wales chemical and oil industry (Willett 1994) look for work experience and personal attitude (maturity), rather than formal qualifications. 'Such companies commented that providing better training to school leavers was unlikely to change their recruitment policies' (p.26).

Relevant studies (NBEET 1992; NBEET 1995; Business/Higher Education Round Table 1992; Guthrie 1994; National Industry Education Forum 1991) show that employers believe that new employees need communication skills as key skills. The major weakness of school graduates was lack of the communication skills necessary for approaching customers confidently and being able to engage in conversation. Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu (in NBEET 1995, p.26) states that school graduates 'also find it difficult to empathise with customers'. However, this is possibly also a characteristic of age and lack of life experiences and, as such, is not a reasonable expectation to hold in relation to early school leavers seeking employment.

Another finding from the Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu study is that beyond a minimum cut-off point there is no great emphasis placed by employers on academic results (p.27). Generally, employers prefer to recruit people who have undergone work experience within a company or those who come to them with a reference from a valued source.

However, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training study (NBEET 1995, p.32) stated that 53 per cent of employers said that their requirement for school graduates would decrease, 68 per cent said their requirement for TAFE graduates would increase, while 86 per cent said their requirement for university-trained graduates would increase. The

Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu findings cited extensively by NBEET concluded that 'lack of work experience among school graduates is considered an advantage'. They also:

> *... confirmed that young people need to gain a post-school qualification in order to be able to compete in the labour market for secure 'mainstream' employment.*
>
> (NBEET 1995, p.34)

There is a mismatch between the 'outputs' of the education and training sectors and employers' requirements (p.70).

In the mid-1990s the then CES was accessed by about 50 per cent of employers to find employees.

Training and apprenticeships

In the past the apprenticeship system and, more recently, the traineeship system has provided training and some income and has been accessed in greater numbers by early school leavers than by Year 12 graduates. However, this system is undergoing changes and is now known as New Apprenticeships. Apprentices participate in a registered training agreement which involves paid work and structured training, and gain a nationally recognised qualification. Part-time apprenticeships and traineeships can be commenced at school (DEETYA 1997a). Information could be difficult for young people to find as this scheme is to be marketed and phased in over a period of time. For apprenticeship-type arrangements to flourish 'they need to be supported by a number of associated organisations' such as labour market agencies and strong trade unions with consensus between unions and employers on key issues (Sweet 1995b, p.22).

In Great Britain's Youth Training (YT) program, the experience has been that having encouraged employers to give trainees employment status and to top up their training allowances, trainees are still working for considerably less than their peers outside the system. The persistent criticism of such schemes is that they are 'slave labour' (Hughes 1984; McDonald 1988; White & Brockington 1983—all cited in Coles 1995, p.37) and, as such, are not considered an option by many young people.

Group or co-operative training, whereby the training of an individual is shared during the indenture period, is another option which provides opportunities for young people to gain training in fluctuating industries and in isolated areas.

Employment patterns of early school leavers

> *Thirty years ago young people who left school at the age of 15 and joined a bank, the public service, a major retailer, or who gained an apprenticeship with a major manufacturer could reasonably look forward to full-time employment for life.*
>
> (Sweet 1997, p.4)

All this has changed!

Holden's (1992) longitudinal study of disaffiliated early school leavers followed the pathways of 132 early school leavers. It showed that starting with one particular pathway was not a predictor that people would stay within that or related pathways. Young people who moved into employment as a first-time option did not necessarily remain either in employment or move into training and further education pathways. The pathways initially identified were financial dependence on the family, employment, income support (usually unemployment benefit), education, and illegal activities. There was no clear delineation of pathways. For many of the young people the pathway was more a culmination of factors than a conscious decision.

The Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (Lamb 1997) found that young people who possess the weakest literacy and numeracy skills experience the longest periods of unemployment. Young people who do not complete Year 12 and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds also have long periods of unemployment. Lamb concluded that schools have a critical role to play in helping young people successfully to enter the labour market through raised levels of literacy and numeracy skills.

However, while literacy and numeracy are factors, these young people are trying to enter a labour market with a steadily and steeply expanding casualisation of both full-time and part-time work (Teicher [ed.] 1996, p.72), a precarious marketplace for successful transition from early school leaving to work. Some casual employment meets short-term or unexpected peaks, is used as a cover for regular peaks, absences, as a 'wedge' during changes in work practices, as well as long-term replacement and need for specialists. However, there is an element of 'non-genuine' casual employment in which employees are churned through on 'probation'. This trend distinguishes Australia from other OECD countries (Teicher [ed.] 1996; Campbell & Burgess 1997). Teicher comments that it is not clear whether casual employment can be regarded as a 'bridge' or a 'trap'—it often ends in a cul-de-sac!

One program aimed at transition from school to work was the Jobs Pathway Guarantee announced in 1995 by the then Federal Government (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 1996). Pilot studies were set up to investigate the links between school and employment. Pathways into higher education from Year 12 completion are well-documented and clear, while links to employment and links through TAFE to higher education or employment are less clear for those not completing Year 12. It was shown that those who have not completed Year 12 are more likely to take up part-time work that is not linked in any way to study. In addition, a number of the pilot programs found that the job-seeking skills and employment skills of these school leavers were generally poor.

In 1979 Sturman stated in his chapter on early school leavers and the transition to work: 'what is being argued is that the decision to leave school should become less important in determining the subsequent life chances' (p.104).

In 1979 early school leavers were more likely to:

- end up with a low-status job
- experience unemployment
- experience unpleasant working conditions (including pay, physical conditions and monotonous and uninspiring work)

In this regard, at least, little seems to have changed in nearly two decades!

Young people and TAFE

During the 1970s, the percentage of students staying at school until Year 12 had only risen from 30 per cent over all schools in 1970 to 35 per cent over all schools in 1978. At this time there were arguments mounted for second-chance education, TAFE retraining programs and an Australia-wide uniform structure for apprenticeships (Sturman 1979, pp.104–106). 'What are needed', argued Sturman, 'are both policies designed to create jobs for youth, as well as changes in the transitional process' (p.107) .

The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1993 study of New South Wales students in Years 10–12 found that only 15 per cent actually planned to go to TAFE. TAFE had been considered by a further 50 per cent who had decided against it—the perception that university is better than TAFE increases with progress through high school (in Dwyer et al. 1997). In addition, a three-year longitudinal study of early school leavers identified 'considerable resistance to and dissatisfaction with VET options' (Holden 1992, p.9) and that their low levels of participation and success were confirmed by Lamb (1994) and Wyn and Holden (1994), all cited by Dwyer et al. (1997).

Lamb (1997, p.vi) found that young people with weak literacy and numeracy skills are less likely to enrol in TAFE courses, and that young women entering TAFE tend to have average to above-average literacy skills but weak numeracy skills. In addition, he discovered that young male participants are more often drawn from average achievers, and participants in apprenticeships are more often low to very low achievers in literacy and numeracy.

It is worth noting (Lamb 1997, p.14) that about 12 per cent of young woman who were early school leavers entered TAFE compared with 20 per cent of those who completed Year 12. These figures, along with figures showing only a marginally smaller gap for young men, are consistent with the trend toward access to TAFE from a higher level of schooling and from university study. Lamb suggests that early school leavers may have increasing difficulty in gaining access to tertiary and training courses.

Many indigenous Australians have not fitted comfortably into mainstream pathways into VET. Reasons given are that they may have lacked the required basic educational prerequisites (due to early school leaving) and found the pathways 'out of harmony' with their own cultural views (Teasdale & Teasdale 1996, p.80).

The relationship between early school leaving and social disadvantage

The relationship between early school leaving and social disadvantage is difficult to untangle. However, in 1990 Dwyer et al., in their study on Victorian early school leavers, concluded that:

- young Koori people continued to be the most disadvantaged of all school leavers
- country students had a higher rate of early school leaving
- low income is a predominant cause of early school leaving
- residential insecurity, and especially homelessness, is a major contributing factor to early school leaving

Dwyer et al. also found that young people were more likely to find employment in industries requiring few skills and offering little opportunity for career potential, with young women gaining employment in an even narrower range of jobs than young men. The youth wage ensured that many young people lived below the poverty line.

Further unpacking of the uniqueness of the 'at riskness' of students from geographically isolated areas was undertaken by West in Holden (1993) to include factors such as:

- lack of expectation on the part of parents and peers
- lack of vocational role models
- limited exposure to, and experience in, education and training available in cities and provincial centres
- prior knowledge and the standing of the student and their family in the community

Chapman and Smith (in Gregory & Karmel 1992, p.275), in their quantitative study on predicting the long-term unemployed, 'standardised' individuals in terms of expected unemployment duration. An individual with 'poor' characteristics is one who has not completed high school, is male and lives in a rural area. An individual with 'good' characteristics lives in a capital city, is female and has completed education to at least Year 12. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum report, *Australia's youth: Reality and risk*, states:

> *Young people engaged in marginal activities are more likely to be early school leavers; to have parents who have an occupational background that is unskilled and manual; and to be indigenous Australians. A number of other socio-economic factors are also important. The extreme disadvantage of early school leaving is apparent.*
>
> (Dusseldorp Skills Forum 1998, p.103)

A critique of research into Aboriginal youth subculture (Palmer & Collard, in White [ed.] 1993) made the point that most research is situated within Anglo-academic assumptions or in public policy which is based in Anglo-centric assumptions.

What were the directions?

Dwyer and Wilson's (1991) recommendations for structured pathways for young people encapsulate the main thrust of the literature:

- a research base (as in Sweden)
- a diversity of pathways (as no single pathway can suit all)
- addressing the changes in labour market realities
- providing opportunities for re-entry to education (second-chance education)
- matched assistance strategies whereby particular groups with experiences in common are targetted

After further research, Dwyer and the YRC (1996, p.77) argue that in their view 'the current generation of young Australians is particularly exposed to uncertainty and risk with regard to the future'. They concluded that policy frameworks which reverse the trend towards fragmentation, isolation and loss of significance of youth policy are needed.

Recommendations made by Holden (1993, p.6) in relation to those young people determined to leave school early still seem to hold. That is, there is a need for *policy* decisions that will result in improved opportunities. This can be achieved by developing links between schools and communities, instituting structured exit procedures from school, and by helping to facilitate the flow of information between young people, schools and community resources. In relation to employment and training programs, there was a need to move away from the rigid outcomes-driven notion of 'success' and in place emphasise innovation. *Programs* should be innovative in regard to structure and method and should consider the whole life of the young person while *practices* should be focussed more at the individual level, recognising differences and producing outcomes that allow for flexibility.

3 The Central Coast region

This section explores the nature of the Central Coast study area. There are several reasons for examining the characteristics of the region:

- The region's socio-economic make-up and the fact that it is a rapidly growing area affects the kind of jobs, courses and social services available to young people. There are lifestyle factors that lead people to move to an area and raise their families there, including the cost of housing relative to their income, and the attractions of lakeside or beachside lifestyle.
- Also important are the kinds of social groupings and sub-cultures which may influence young people's attitudes to early leaving and their perception of employment and training options—expectations about work and unemployment, the value of education and training and so on. These and other factors affect patterns of VET participation by the 15–19 year-old age group in the area.
- Service providers, employers and educational institutions have knowledge of the area which affects their understanding of early leavers and the options for youth in the area. Having background information about the area is needed to interpret the research data from these respondents.

Social mapping can be carried out at different levels. Comparisons of Gosford and Wyong local government areas can be made with other areas using census and other data. In addition, there are important variations within each of the two local government areas; for example, across postcodes and neighbourhoods (approximated by ABS census collection districts). This analysis will refer to these variations.

A range of social indicators is used in this mapping, derived from the 1996 census. These indicators are demography, including age structure, levels of educational qualification, levels of employment and labour force participation, occupational differences and family income. These indicators are known to influence participation in employment, education and training, and are often correlated.

The area

The Central Coast region (figure 3.1) comprises two local government areas, Wyong Shire and Gosford City Council. The region runs from Brooklyn in the south to Morisset 60kms further north and has an estimated population of over 300 000 people scattered throughout over 80 suburbs and localities. The Gosford area surrounds the Brisbane Water, east to ocean beaches such as Avoca, Macmasters Beach and south to Broken Bay. The Wyong area is settled around the Tuggerah Lakes, from the Entrance to the south to Wyee and Budgewoi to the north, with Toukley on the narrow spit on the ocean side. Ourimbah straddles the boundary between the LGAs.

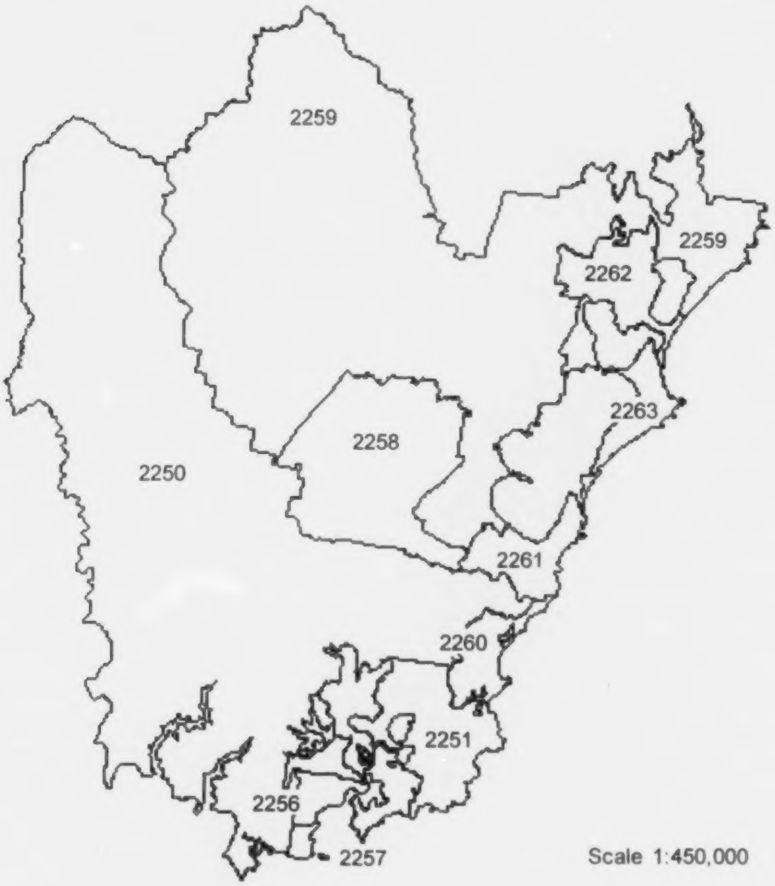
The area is bisected north to south by interurban and interstate rail services and national highway and freeway links. The Gosford area is more densely settled and marginally wealthier than Wyong Shire which has one of the lowest median household incomes in New South Wales. Gosford is the administrative and retail centre for the Coast, with older established suburban subdivisions, while Wyong is more remote and has fewer transport and other services. There are older established TAFE colleges in Gosford and Wyong and a new multi-campus educational precinct serving the new growth areas surrounding Ourimbah.

Historically the two towns and their LGAs were distinct and relatively isolated from Sydney as family holiday and weekender settlements. With the expansion of the Sydney conurbation and the upgrading of road and rail links, the area has been brought within commuting distance of Sydney. The older settlements have been extended by new housing subdivisions making the region one of the fastest growing in New South Wales.

This growth leads to particular patterns in local employment in construction and retail services and health, education and community services. The area has a mix of older retired people, often associated with low income and low labour force participation, younger families who have moved to the area for its cheaper housing and lifestyle advantages, and pockets of poverty associated with low income, high unemployment and low educational levels. The expanding younger population has greatly increased the demand for educational services. When children reach school-leaving age they move in to a labour market that is limited in size and employment opportunities, especially compared to places closer to Sydney such as various suburbs in Northern Sydney, and subsequently the area has a large population of commuting workers.

The postcodes making up the region (figure 3.1) are based on Gosford (2250) and Wyong (2259) which cover very large areas and incorporate many new suburbs, while Woy Woy (2256), Ettalong Beach (2257), Avoca (2251), Terrigal (2260), Toukley (2263) and Budgewoi (2262) are more established holiday or retirement towns. At the 1996 census the region was notably Anglo-Australian in ethnic composition with from 3–5 per cent of people born in non-English-speaking countries, relatively few people speaking a language other than English at home (less than 5% in all postcodes) and few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.

Figure 3.1: Central Coast postcodes



2250 GOSFORD	Brisbane Waters, East Gosford, Erina, Gosford, Gosford South, Mangrove Mountain, Narara, Niagara Park, Point Clare, Somersby, West Gosford, Wyoming
2251 AVOCA	Copacabana, Kincumber, McMasters Beach, Green Point, Saratoga
2256 WOY WOY	Patonga, Pearl Beach, Wondabyne, Woy Woy
2257 ETTALONG BEACH	Ettalong Beach, Empire Beach, Hardy's Bay, Killcare, Umina, Wagstaff
2258 OURIMBAH	Kangy Angy, Ourimbah
2259 WYONG	Chittaway Point, Gwandalan, Lake Munmorah, Lakeside, Mannering Park, North Wyong, Soldiers Beach, Tuggerah, Tuggerawong, Warnervale, Wyee, Yarramalong, Palmdale
2260 TERRIGAL	Erina Heights, North Avoca, Terrigal
2261 THE ENTRANCE	Bateau Bay, Bay Village, Blue Bay, Berkeley Vale, Killarney Vale, Long Jetty, Tumbi Umbi, Wamberal
2262 BUDGEWOI	Blue Haven, Doyalson, Halekulani, San Remo
2263 TOUKLEY	Charmhaven, Gorokan, Noraville, Norah Head

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Variations within the region

Tables 3.1–3.3 summarise the values for a range of indicators for the Central Coast. The following generalisations can be made about differences among the postcodes making up the region:

- *youth and youth unemployment*: Gosford, Terrigal and Ourimbah had the highest concentrations of young people aged 15–24 in the region (around 13% of the population). However, the highest rates of youth unemployment (around 22%) are found in Wyong, Toukley, Budgewoi and The Entrance, compared to the generally lower rate of postcodes near Gosford of some 15 per cent
- *aged and retired population*: older residents are found in larger numbers in the older beachside or bayside 'retirement areas' of Ettalong, Woy Woy, The Entrance and Toukley. The proportion of residents aged 55 and over in these areas has declined from about 40 per cent to 33 per cent between 1991 and 1996, although it is still high compared to the New South Wales figure of 25 per cent. Ourimbah stands out as a much younger population (and a more qualified and working one) than other postcodes
- *educational qualifications*: Gosford, Terrigal and Avoca postcodes have higher levels of qualified people than the Wyong postcodes, but all postcodes have higher or comparable levels of skilled and basic vocational qualifications (not shown in table 3.1). The retirement areas again have notably greater proportions of unqualified people associated with age and occupational trends
- *labour force participation*: this is markedly higher in Ourimbah (27% not in the labour force), Gosford and Terrigal than other postcodes, particularly the older retirement areas of Toukley (54% not in the labour force), Ettalong, Woy Woy and The Entrance. High unemployment exists alongside low labour force participation in the Wyong area generally, especially Toukley and Budgewoi—there are large numbers of people either not looking for work or not able to find it. Ourimbah stands out as having lower unemployment and high labour force participation
- *occupational profiles*: there are marked differences among the postcodes in their occupational mix. Concentrations of managers and professionals are found in Terrigal, Gosford, Avoca and Ourimbah, comparable to Sydney and New South Wales, (25% of those in the labour force). There are proportionally more non-professional occupations in the northern Wyong postcodes (not shown) consistent with lower education, income and labour force participation
- *family income*: the Central Coast as a whole is not well off, although there are new pockets of affluence to be found adjoining older, low-income areas. Both Gosford and Wyong had median annual household incomes considerably less than that of Sydney as a whole. In 1996 the poorest postcodes were Ettalong and Woy Woy, Toukley, Budgewoi and The Entrance. These postcodes had around 30 per cent of households living on less than $300 per week ($15 600 per annum [pa]) and around 50 per cent of households earning less than $500 ($26 000 pa). Ourimbah stands out as a wealthier postcode
- *housing*: in Terrigal, Gosford and Ourimbah there are high proportions of households which had monthly mortgage payments over $1000 in 1991, and significant areas with one family households purchasing a home as opposed to renting

Table 3.1: Selected social indicators, Central Coast, 1996 census

	Persons	Aged 15–24 %	Aged 55+ %	Qualified (a)	Not in labour force % (a)	Youth unempl. rate (b)	Total unempl. rate (b)	Occup. groups 1 & 2 (c)
Gosford 2250	57 809	12.8	20.9	44.3	37.9	14.9	7.7	25.1
Avoca 2251	29 370	10.2	25.1	47.3	43.4	15.3	8.5	24.9
Woy Woy 2256	14 168	10.7	34.8	39.5	50.6	17.0	11.1	18.6
Ettalong 2257	25 328	11.1	32.2	38.8	49.2	17.6	11.6	18.4
Ourimbah 2258	3 291	13.7	12.3	45.1	27.4	13.1	7.1	22.8
Wyong 2259	46 846	11.2	21.4	39.4	41.8	19.3	10.6	18.2
Terrigal 2260	17 243	13.7	23.2	49.3	35.5	14.0	7.8	29.5
Entrance 2261	32 625	11.4	32.4	38.1	50.5	22.9	14.1	17.8
Budgewoi 2262	14 544	10.8	24.6	36.1	48.5	22.2	14.5	13.4
Toukley 2263	21 151	11.5	34.5	38.3	53.8	22.5	14.1	15.9

Note: (a) As a proportion of the population aged 15 and over, (b) As a proportion of the population in the labour force, (c) Managers, administrators and professionals, as a proportion of those in the labour force

Table 3.2: Weekly household income, 1996 by postcode

Prop. of households with a weekly household income of—

	<$300	<$500	Over $500	Over $1000	Over $1500	Monthly mortgage over $1000
Gosford 2250	18.8	34.1	65.9	26.4	9.6	41.8
Avoca 2251	20.6	38.9	61.1	21.9	7.8	40.4
Woy Woy 2256	29.4	49.0	51.0	15.8	5.3	33.1
Ettalong 2257	28.1	48.9	51.1	16.0	5.6	32.5
Ourimbah 2258	11.8	25.2	74.8	33.2	11.9	49.2
Wyong 2259	22.3	40.7	59.3	19.3	6.0	34.7
Terrigal 2260	16.8	34.0	66.0	27.4	12.0	44.6
Entrance 2261	30.3	50.8	49.2	14.4	4.8	35.0
Budgewoi 2262	27.6	48.5	51.5	12.9	3.4	29.3
Toukley 2263	32.0	54.4	45.6	12.2	3.9	28.5

Neighbourhood analysis

This 'broad-brush' analysis of the region by postcode tends to disguise the extent of its socio-economic diversity, which can be brought more into focus by mapping the same indicators by census collection districts. These approximate neighbourhoods of some 200 people.

The following series of maps of Gosford and Wyong LGAs based on 1996 census data using Cdata96 (ABS 1996) shows some very considerable variation within postcodes. However, it has to be borne in mind that they represent quite thin 'slices' of information.

It is possible to map any indicator, but it is necessary to select from the most relevant. Annual household income is particularly relevant because it is associated with socio-economic disadvantage measured in various ways—low educational levels, high proportions of less-skilled workers, and lower labour force participation (often due to concentrations of older and retired people) and high unemployment.

The point to be made through the selected maps is to suggest that early leavers in particular areas will be at greater risk of poverty and unemployment and limited access to education and training through a combination of circumstances. Within the region, early leavers may be contending with very different social and economic circumstances, since certain areas are considerably more disadvantaged than others. The analysis reinforces the view, developed later in the report, that policy responses to early leavers need to take into consideration the local area and its character.

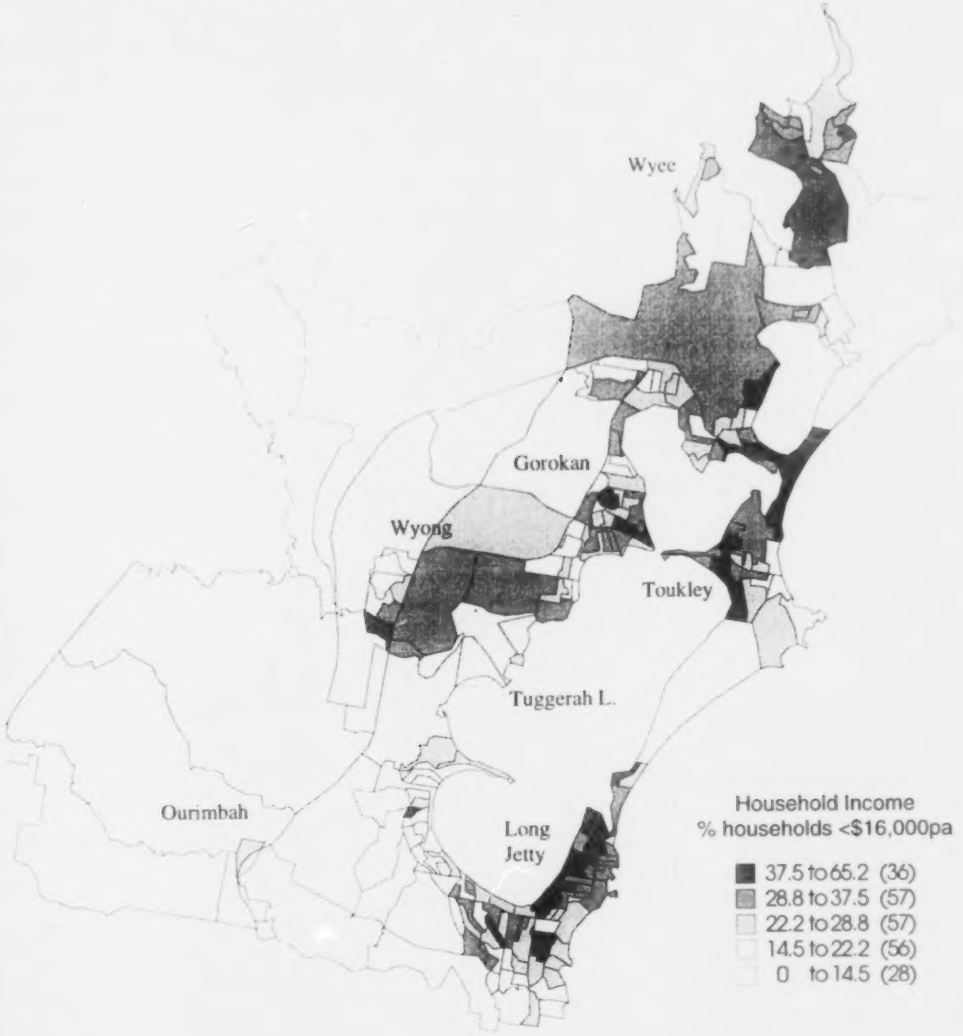
Figure 3.2 shows Wyong LGA. The lakeside areas such as Gorokan had a high proportion of households below an annual household income of $16 000 (equivalent to a weekly income of about $300). In contrast, the area around Ourimbah is comparatively better off, and this maps on to higher educational participation, greater labour force participation and higher levels of educational qualification and participation.

In figure 3.3, there is a similar variation in the Gosford LGA of neighbourhoods with low annual household income often associated with the older established areas central to Gosford, Woy Woy and other areas. These contrast with pockets of wealthier residents found, for example, in along the coast and in the rural hinterland. These more affluent areas map on to high concentrations of professionals and managers and higher proportions of post-school qualifications.

Among the various indicators of interest in predicting where early leaving may be highest is youth unemployment, indicated as the proportion of young people aged 15–24 years unemployed at the time of the census. The distribution of young people is highest in the newer residential areas, but unemployment is concentrated in particular areas, including the poorer and more remote locations (figures 3.4 and 3.5).

While there are large numbers of youth aged 15–24 to be found in the Ourimbah, Gorokan, Wyong town and Wyee localities, the highest *levels* of youth unemployment in the Wyong LGA (figure 3.4) are not in those neighbourhoods, but south of Wyong or near Long Jetty, for example. Similarly, the pockets of high youth unemployment to be found in the Gosford LGA (figure 3.5)—for example in Ettalong, around Gosford town, near Avoca and Terrigal—are not by any means the areas with large numbers of youth. It is possible, therefore, that some young people are more ‘at risk’ not only because of socio-economic circumstances such as low incomes, but because they also are more remote from the educational and support services for youth to be found in the regional centres. The picture is one, therefore, of quite specific areas of relative disadvantage that may translate into circumstances encouraging early leaving.

Figure 3.2: Household income levels, Wyong LGA, 1996


Wyee
Gorokan
Wyong
Toukley
Tuggerah L.
Ourimbah
Long Jetty
Household Income
% households <$16,000pa
■ 37.5 to 65.2 (36)
▨ 28.8 to 37.5 (57)
□ 22.2 to 28.8 (57)
□ 14.5 to 22.2 (56)
□ 0 to 14.5 (28)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, Cdata96, Census of Population and Housing

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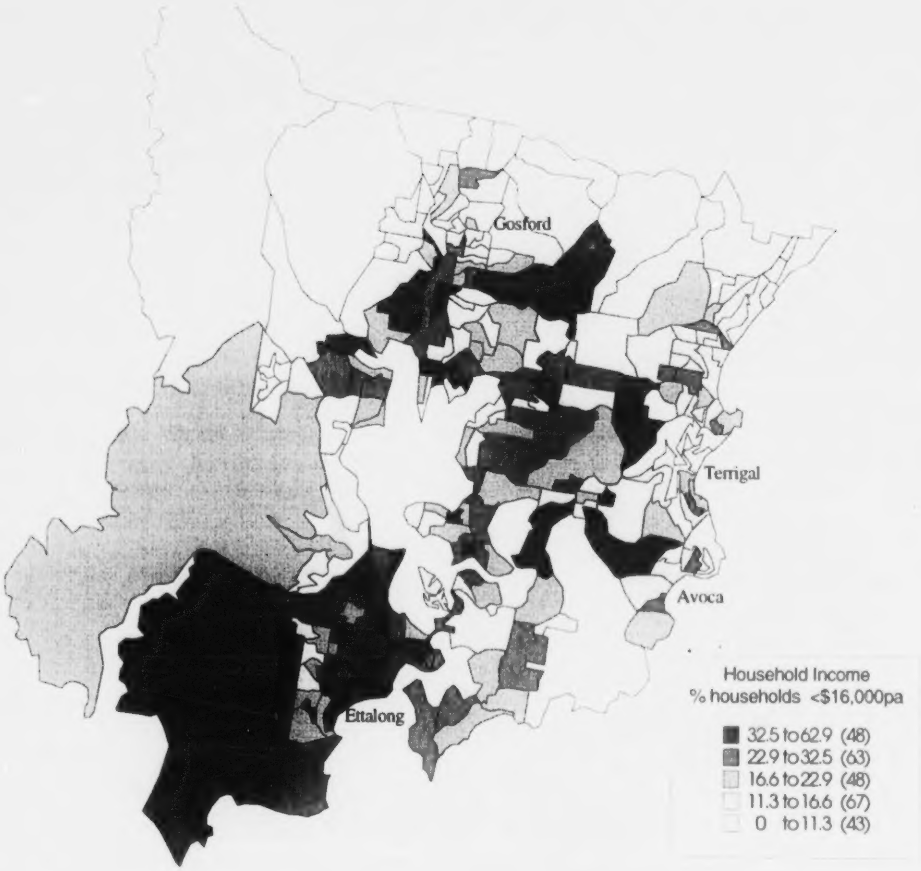
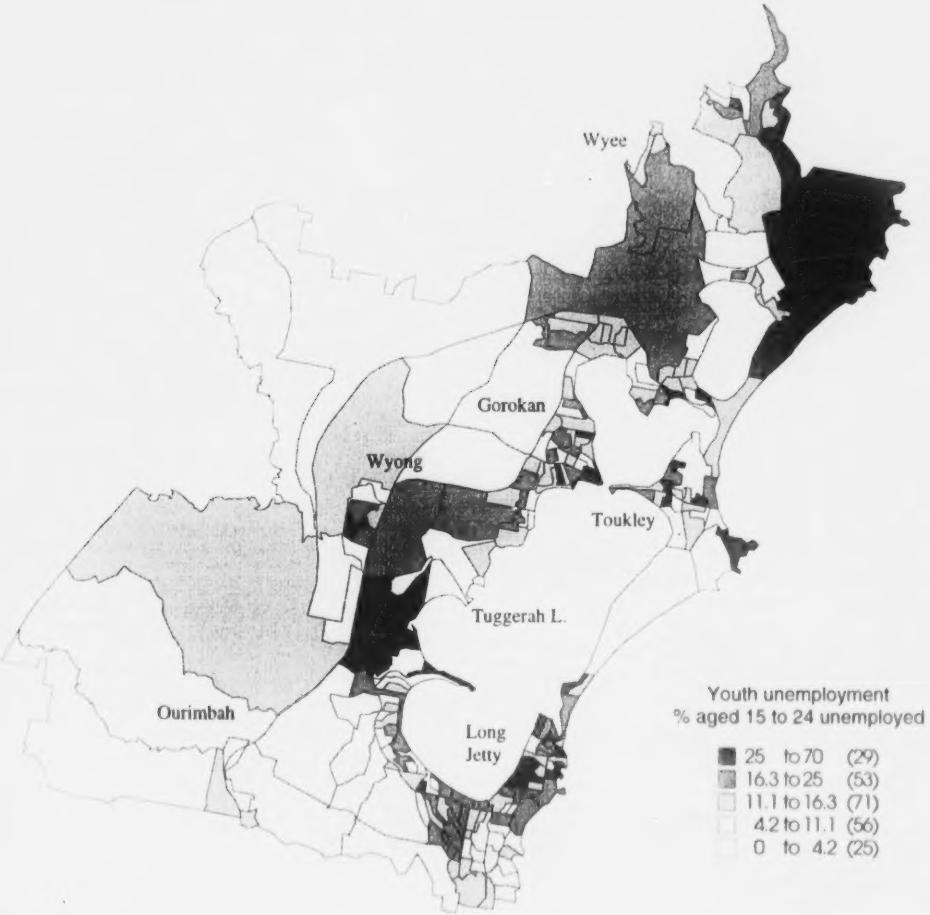
Figure 3.3: Household income levels, Gosford LGA, 1996


Gosford
Terrigal
Avoca
Ettalong
Household Income
% households <$16,000pa
■ 32.5 to 62.9 (48)
▨ 22.9 to 32.5 (63)
░ 16.6 to 22.9 (48)
☐ 11.3 to 16.6 (67)
☐ 0 to 11.3 (43)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, Cdata96, Census of Population and Housing

Figure 3.4: Youth unemployment, 15–24 age group, Wyong 1996


Wyee
Gorokan
Wyong
Toukley
Tuggerah L.
Ourimbah
Long Jetty
Youth unemployment
% aged 15 to 24 unemployed
■ 25 to 70 (29)
▨ 16.3 to 25 (53)
☐ 11.1 to 16.3 (71)
☐ 4.2 to 11.1 (56)
☐ 0 to 4.2 (25)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, Cdata96, Census of Population and Housing

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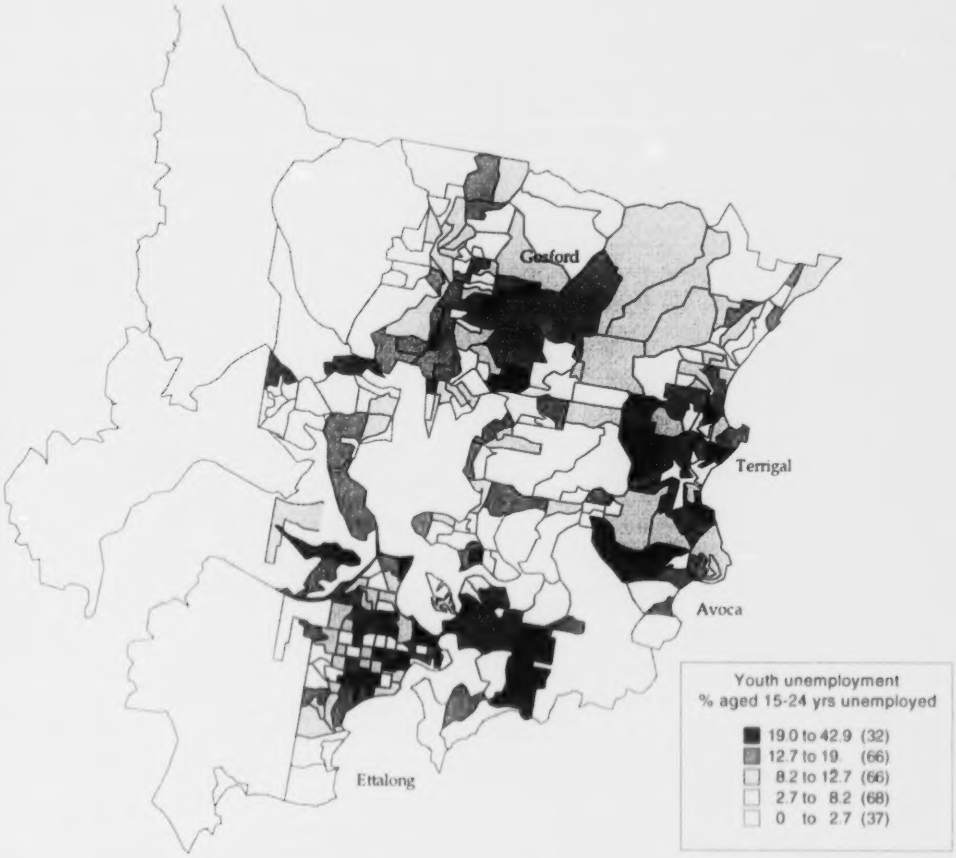
Figure 3.5: Youth unemployment, 15–24 age group, 1996, Gosford


Gosford
Terrigal
Avoca
Ettalong
Youth unemployment
% aged 15-24 yrs unemployed
19.0 to 42.9 (32)
12.7 to 19 (66)
8.2 to 12.7 (66)
2.7 to 8.2 (68)
0 to 2.7 (37)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996, Cdata96, Census of Population and Housing

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Implications

This social mapping of the region has emphasised both the comparison with the State generally and the significant differences within the region. The evident differences in education, occupation and income suggest that:

- in certain areas, particularly in the newer eastern lakeside subdivisions to the north of Wyong, but also to the south of Gosford around Woy Woy and Ettalong Beach, there will be large numbers of young people reaching the end of compulsory schooling
- in some of these areas, low income and other factors associated with low educational participation—including those associated with the occupational backgrounds of parents, combined with considerable pressures on local high schools—may result in numbers of young people leaving school earlier rather than staying on to Year 12
- in some of these localities, there will be fewer or more limited job opportunities compared to other localities which are closer to retail and other centres such as Gosford, and this is reflected in higher youth unemployment
- some of these localities are relatively isolated from the main transport nodes and they may lack other services supporting school leavers, compounding their difficulties

TAFE participation on the Central Coast

There are a number of factors that make TAFE participation on the Central Coast worth exploring. These include the relatively high numbers of young people in the area and the importance of TAFE courses as an option for early leavers, both as an alternative path to the HSC and as vocational training in its own right.

The leavers' interviews reported in the next chapter indicate the importance of VET as an option for early school leavers. If TAFE and other VET providers are playing a role in meeting their needs, this should be apparent in an analysis of enrolment data.

This section examines a number of questions regarding recent participation in TAFE on the Central Coast compared to the Hunter Institute and New South Wales generally, including:

- what is the TAFE participation of young people aged 15–19 compared to other age groups on the Central Coast?
- in what types of courses do they participate?
- what are the participation rates within the different postcodes comprising the region, given the socio-economic variations?

Age participation

There are relatively large numbers of young people aged 15–19 on the Central Coast. Gosford and Wyong are the largest postcodes in the area, covering many specific localities (described above in the analysis of the region). These postcodes have the largest populations of young people. The highest proportions of the age group are concentrated in Gosford, Ourimbah and Terrigal postcodes.

The total enrolments in TAFE from postcodes in the region (not only those of enrolments at local campuses) are somewhat less than a quarter of the age cohort (table 3.3). Some 23 per cent of 15–19 year olds are studying in TAFE. The participation rate of 15–19 year olds is, however, significantly lower in Wyong (17%) than elsewhere and higher in The Entrance (34.8%), Ourimbah (29.5%) and Ettalong (27.4%). TAFE campuses are located in the town of Wyong, within central Gosford and at Ourimbah.

The proportions of young people aged 15–19 attending TAFE are comparable to those found in the Hunter Institute, and higher than those in metropolitan TAFE or New South Wales as a whole.

This pattern was also found at the local campus level. A significant proportion of young people who enrolled at Gosford and Wyong TAFE campuses in 1996 were aged under 20, and there are generally more younger than older people enrolled. A third (30%) of Wyong enrolments and a quarter of Gosford's enrolments were aged 19 or younger. More than 10 per cent of Wyong and 8 per cent of Gosford enrolments were under 16 years of age.

The proportions of young people aged under 15, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 were higher than those in the Hunter and in New South Wales as a whole, with notably lower proportions of enrolments in other age groups. It could be concluded that these campuses reflect the large numbers of young people demanding TAFE on the Central Coast.

Other data show that the enrolments of young men outweigh those of young women up to the 25–29 year age group, approximately in the ratio 60:40, but this is reversed in the older age groups with older women making up to 60 per cent of enrolments. This can be attributed to the effects of young men taking the majority of apprenticeship places.

Table 3.3: 1996 enrolments aged 15–19 years in TAFE by postcode

Postcode	Aged 15–19		Partic. rate (%)	Total persons	As %
	In TAFE	Population			
Gosford 2250	855	3 958	21.6	57 809	6.8
Avoca 2251	376	1 752	21.5	29 370	6.0
Woy Woy 2256	163	749	21.8	14 168	5.3
Ettalong 2257	385	1 407	27.4	25 328	5.6
Ourimbah 2258	67	227	29.5	3 291	6.9
Wyong 2259	484	2 813	17.2	46 846	6.0
Terrigal 2260	282	1 165	24.2	17 243	6.8
Entrance 2261	652	1 871	34.8	32 625	5.7
Budgewoi 2262	208	803	25.9	14 544	5.5
Toukley 2263	304	1 292	23.5	21 151	6.1
Central Coast	3776	16 037	23.4	262 375	6.1

Source: TAFE Statistical Unit, NSW

Table 3.4: 1996 enrolments aged 15–19 years in TAFE

	15 & under	16	17	18	19	Total
All Central Coast	232	807	758	1 041	938	3 776
	1.6	5.6	5.2	7.2	6.5	26.1
Hunter Institute	629	3 055	3 205	4 017	3 550	14 456
	1.2	5.8	6.0	7.6	6.7	27.3
Metropolitan	2 831	8 090	10 145	15 854	15 342	52 262
	1.3	3.7	4.6	7.2	7.0	23.8
NSW	7 091	19 323	21 844	28 758	26 368	103 384
	1.7	4.6	5.2	6.9	6.3	24.7

Source: TAFE Statistical Unit, NSW

Stream of study

In which streams of study do young people aged 15–19 participate when they attend TAFE on the Central Coast? Analysis of 1996 enrolments in two local campuses by stream of study shows a number of age-related trends.

- The majority of enrolments in this age group are found in initial vocational training including operatives training (Stream 3100) and initial trade training (Stream 3200). Gosford has proportionally more enrolments in the trades area than Wyong, which has more in the Streams 2000 and 4000.
- There is a significant concentration of 15–19 year olds in Stream 2000 (basic education 2100 and educational preparation 2200) which includes general education courses such as the Year 10 and HSC equivalent and adult literacy and pre-vocational courses. A third of those enrolments are at Wyong and a quarter at Gosford.
- The proportions of students older than 24 enrolling in the Stream 2000 courses are higher than those of young people, rising with age to comprise over half the enrolments by students aged 50 and over. This pattern is more pronounced on the Coast than in the Hunter as a whole. There are much greater numbers of older students enrolled in these courses (many of them in workplaces) and, in general, they are mostly in basic education.

Closer inspection of the enrolments of the 15–19 age group (table 3.6) shows that the number of young people enrolled are quite significant compared to the number of Central Coast leavers in 1996. There were some 400 Year 10 leavers and some 600 Year 11 leavers from the 11 Central Coast schools for which data were collected.

At Gosford in 1996 there were 82 enrolments aged 15 or younger, 40 per cent in Stream 2000 and the rest in Stream 3000. At age 16, there were 235 enrolments, half of which were in initial trade training (Stream 3200) with 22 per cent in Stream 2000. At age 17 and 19, there were fewer enrolments than at age 16 and 18, reflecting perhaps the effects of school leaving. With increasing age, the numbers in higher streams of study increase, but are never more than 15 per cent of the enrolments.

At Wyong, there were proportionally more enrolments in basic education (47% or nearly half of the youngest students aged 15 or younger) and a quarter of 16, 17 and 18 year olds. Among the 16 year olds, there were 114 in basic education and 171 in initial operative training, much greater than the numbers of trade apprentices (about 20% in all 3200 streams). Only from 18 years of age do these streams become important.

One conclusion, therefore, is that the provision of places in educational preparation and lower-level training is appropriate for the kinds of early school leavers who look to TAFE for an alternative to schooling. The research data presented in chapter 4 will, however, suggest that the relative lack of apprenticeship training in these two campuses is a cause for concern to young people living in the area and leaving school with expectations of entering a trade. (The provision of trade places at the Ourimbah TAFE campus is not taken into account here).

Table 3.5: Stream of study, Central Coast enrolments, 1996

(a) Gosford campus

	Stream of study (%)					
	2000	3100	3200	Other 3000	4000	Enrols
15–19	27.3	19.3	47.2	5.8	0.2	995
20–24	26.8	14.5	29.7	25.7	3.2	649
25–29	33.0	15.4	20.0	25.9	5.7	421
30–39	52.6	11.0	12.8	18.3	5.3	928
40–49	56.0	13.2	9.2	18.2	3.5	661
50 +	64.1	6.8	8.3	19.7	1.1	351
Total						4008

(b) Wyong campus

	Stream of study (%)					
Age	2000	3100	3200	Other 3000	4000	Enrols
15–19	33.5	28.7	32.9	4.2	0.6	1401
20–24	25.4	21.7	25.9	22.7	4.2	673
25–29	26.7	34.1	14.4	13.3	10.1	375
30–39	39.7	33.3	9.6	6.9	10.0	856
40–49	53.7	25.6	7.9	3.7	9.0	812
50 +	75.8	12.5	3.0	1.0	7.5	504
Total	41.0	26.7	18.4	7.7	5.9	4663

(c) Hunter Institute

	Stream of study (%)					
Age	2000	3100	3200	Other 3000	4000	Enrols
15–19	25.1	23.6	38.8	9.0	1.6	13 622
20–24	21.9	18.3	27.1	25.0	7.7	9 284
25–29	25.4	21.7	17.9	24.6	5.5	4 945
30–39	27.9	24.7	14.6	19.7	13.5	9 574
40–49	31.1	24.6	12.4	16.0	11.7	6 831
50 +	42.0	25.4	9.7	9.3	4.5	3 093
Total	12 879	10 878	11 285	8 049	4 235	47 601

Source: TAFE Statistical Unit, NSW

Table 3.6: Central Coast, youth enrolments by stream of study, 1996

(a) Gosford campus

	Stream of study								
	2100	2200	3100	3211	3212	3221	3222	Other	Total
15 & under	17	18	22	14	10	0	1	0	82
	20.7	22.0	26.8	17.1	12.2	0.0	1.2	0.0	100.0
16	25	28	51	69	47	0	14	0	235
	10.6	11.9	21.7	29.4	20.0	0.0	6.0	0.0	100.0
17	38	27	54	28	53	0	13	3	216
	17.6	12.5	25.0	13.0	24.5	0.0	6.0	1.4	100.0
18	35	21	39	17	69	0	42	28	251
	13.9	8.4	15.5	6.8	27.5	0.0	16.7	11.2	100.0
19	49	14	26	9	62	0	22	29	211
	23.2	6.6	12.3	4.3	29.4	0.0	10.4	13.7	100.0
Total	164	108	192	137	241	0	92	60	995
	16.5	10.9	19.3	13.8	24.2	0.0	9.2	6.0	100.0

(b) Wyong campus

	Stream of study							
	2100	2200	3100	3211	3212	3221	Other	Total
15 & under	60	27	11	26	1	1	0	126
	47.6	21.4	8.7	20.6	0.8	0.8	0.0	100.0
16	114	22	171	15	38	35	15	410
	27.8	5.4	41.7	3.7	9.3	8.5	3.7	100.0
17	73	35	97	19	53	10	28	315
	23.2	11.1	30.8	6.0	16.8	3.2	8.9	100.0
18	45	37	69	14	64	1	64	296
	15.2	12.5	23.3	4.7	21.6	0.3	21.6	100.0
19	40	17	54	4	71	3	64	254
	15.7	6.7	21.3	1.6	28.0	1.2	25.2	100.0
Total	332	138	402	78	227	50	171	1401
	23.7	9.9	28.7	5.6	16.2	3.6	12.2	100.0

Employment and TAFE participation

A further aspect of TAFE participation on the Coast is the employment status of those residing on the Coast and attending TAFE at any campus. This highlights the nature of TAFE participants from the area rather than the course profiles of local colleges. Table 3.7 shows the following:

- A third of young Central Coast participants aged 15–19 are employed full time, rising to a half by the age of 20–24; while older participants, aged over 30, were less likely to have full-time jobs in 1996.
- The breakdown of young Central Coast participants shows that less than 5 per cent of 15 year olds and 15 per cent of 16 year olds were employed in full-time work at age 15 or 16,

but nearly half those aged 19 were so employed. However, 20 per cent of 15 year olds and 30 per cent of 16 year olds had part-time work, and this is also true of older participants aged 17–19.

- Approximately a quarter of participants were unemployed and looking for work, across the age range, with proportionally fewer in the 20–29 age group. However, disaggregating the 15–19 age group, over a third (37%) of 15 year olds and 30 per cent of 16 year olds were unemployed, although this fell by age 17 to about one quarter of participants.

Table 3.7: Employment status of Central Coast residents, 1996

	15–19	20–24	25–29	30–39	40–49	50 & over	Total
Employment status							
Full-time	1153	1413	711	1083	685	187	5282
	30.5	52.8	46.4	34.8	31.0	17.7	
Part-time	865	307	127	416	308	82	2115
	22.9	11.5	8.3	13.4	13.9	7.7	
Self-employed, employer	7	51	85	226	146	49	568
	0.2	1.9	5.5	7.3	6.6	4.6	
Unemployed, seeking work	983	531	292	768	650	302	3537
	26.0	19.9	19.0	24.7	29.4	28.5	
Not seeking work	493	148	183	371	219	289	1712
	13.1	5.5	11.9	11.9	9.9	27.3	
Not stated	275	225	135	244	201	150	1249
	7.3	8.4	8.8	7.9	9.1	14.2	
Total	3776	2675	1533	3108	2209	1059	14463

Not stated (103, or 0.7%) not shown.

	Aged 15–19				
Employment status	**15 & under**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**
Full-time	12	117	197	393	434
	5.2	14.5	26.0	37.8	46.3
Part-time	56	247	167	251	144
	24.1	30.6	22.0	24.1	15.4
Self-employed, employer	3	1	0	0	3
	1.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.3
Unemployed, seeking work	86	248	179	246	224
	37.1	30.7	23.6	23.6	23.9
Not seeking work	43	144	154	91	61
	18.5	17.8	20.3	8.7	6.5
Not stated	32	50	61	60	72
	13.8	6.2	8.0	5.8	7.7
Total	232	807	758	1041	938

Source: TAFE Statistical Unit, NSW

This picture of Central Coast participants suggests that significant numbers of young people attending TAFE do so as an alternative to schooling and to unemployment. It also suggests that the alternative for very young participants is often enrolment in a general education kind of course as often as a strictly vocational course. However, it is also true that many Central Coast residents who participate in TAFE have a marginal labour market status, and that TAFE may be playing an important role in addressing the disadvantaged populations described in the regional analysis earlier in this chapter.

4 Early leavers and their experiences

What are young people's experiences of early leaving? What are the circumstances in which they leave? How is their decision to leave regarded by their teachers, families and friends? How much information do they have about their options? What are the consequences of their early leaving, and how do they negotiate their entry into the labour market, and how big a part do job prospects play in their leaving? What role does vocational education and training play as they make their way towards adult roles in life and work? What problems do they encounter when things do not turn out as they expected?

This chapter endeavours to answer some of these questions from information gleaned from face-to-face interviews with 40 Central Coast Year 10 school leavers from government schools, who left in 1996. It captures some of the main themes emerging from these interviews, and attempts to portray early leaving as the early leavers understand it.

The analysis builds on the work of Dwyer and others who have pointed out that the realities of work and study for many young people are more complex than the 'linear models' of youth transition assumed by policy-makers (Dwyer & the YRC 1996; Dwyer & Wyn 1997). Thus, the focus for the chapter is on the different types of leavers and the variety of patterns of early leaving.

The analysis is largely based on a set of vignettes or 'leaver stories' (included as appendix 2) which try to capture in a holistic way something of the circumstances and experiences of each of the 40 young people interviewed. The 40 leavers are discussed in groupings based on two typologies taken from Dwyer's work—one referring to types of early leavers and the other to patterns of youth in transition (the VOCAM typology). These classifications refer to the 'life themes' emerging in the leaver narratives. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the emerging issues in early school leaving, including:

- the role of schools: career advice and preparation for work
- the leavers' experiences of job-seeking and the labour market
- their experiences of courses and study options
- the role of support services
- their advice on changes needed to assist early leavers

The main conclusions from the leaver interviews are:

Types of leavers. There are clearly different types of leavers. Some are very focussed on their career path, and have left to take up options other than further schooling while others have left school in negative circumstances. The 'focussed leavers' have often prepared themselves well ahead of the actual point of departure from school. For others, leaving is more a reaction to negative school experiences, triggered by treatment meted out by the school, or perhaps by an event such as a job offer, inducing them on to the labour market. Among the latter are those who leave without goals for post-school life, who are at risk of failing to make a successful transition to active adult roles.

Transition to adult roles. Dwyer's research on the diversity of experiences of early leaving and the negotiated and fluid nature of the transition from school to work is supported. The youth culture understands well the negotiated nature of transition and that 'paths' are not necessarily either straight or clear. There is a group of leavers who are 'at risk' of not making a transition through the negative circumstances of their leaving and their lack of vocational goals and transition strategies.

School support for leavers. Early leavers are not being served well by their secondary schools, especially those who leave discouraged. The culture of the school is not sufficiently supportive of early leavers or geared to provide them with flexible curriculum options that might give fuller play to their vocational interests and induce them to stay. At the time they leave there is a lack of timely and relevant career advice and counselling. Given that many leavers seek to return to school after negative experiences, it is crucial that schools recognise and adapt to the needs of these returning learners.

How young people get jobs. In obtaining jobs, contacts and networks are important. The role of the family is crucial in terms of their attitude and support as well as the specific help they are able to offer. The leavers themselves are very clear that employers are looking for personal attributes in job applicants that go beyond issues of skill and employment experience.

Lack of transition services. The negative experiences of leavers who are neither successful job-seekers nor vocationally motivated can frequently cause them to regret leaving school once they have a greater realisation of the knowledge, information and skills needed to be successful in the workforce. Among the most common needs expressed are for better support and information at the time of leaving as these are felt to be lacking. Advice and counselling from TAFE and youth services are highly valued.

Access to VET is seen as difficult. The VET training system is catering particularly well in providing an alternative general education for early leavers, but fails to meet the aspirations of young males for entry to skilled trades, where places are seen as scarce and difficult to access. Apprenticeships and traineeships are desired but remote or largely irrelevant to their work and career plans. However, short vocational and employment preparation courses are found to be highly beneficial by leavers without career directions.

Research procedures

In summary:

- A pool of 385 Year 10 leavers was drawn from a database of 1996 school leavers in nine government schools in the Gosford and Wyong area. Not all such schools were included on the database, so the sample under-represents leavers from south of Gosford (Umina, Woy Woy) and over-represents leavers from the Wyong area.
- Leavers were selected for interview according to a set of categories defining 'at-risk' leavers and 'not-at-risk' leavers. Quotas for these categories were set using a proportional

sampling model based on the 1995 tracking survey of 1995 Central Coast school leavers (Teese et al. 1997).

- 365 Year 10 leavers were sent a letter and contacted (alphabetically) by phone both during the day and at night until the sampling categories were filled. About 70 per cent of numbers were not contactable by phone. Of the 30 per cent who were, 21 per cent were not available for interview for various reasons. The sample represents, therefore, about 10 per cent of the pool of 1996 Central Coast leavers.
- An interview schedule was developed and three pilot face-to-face interviews were carried out prior to the 40 main interviews by the researchers who visited the area twice. The interview schedules can be found in appendix 3.
- Each interview was between 40 minutes and an hour. All interviewees were given a consent letter explaining the research and they were paid $20 for attending the interview.
- The interviews were taped with the permission of leavers, and responses were recorded on an interview protocol. These responses were entered onto a database for analysis. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality.

In practice, the sampling categories were less relevant than expected in defining 'at-risk' and 'not-at-risk' leavers, since there was considerable movement by leavers between these categories. This emphasises the negotiated and fluid nature of transition, and supports our focus on types and patterns of transition as a way of understanding which leavers are at risk.

Table 4.1: 1996 Year 10 leavers in nine schools

School	Left in Yr 10	Left in Yr 11	Left in Yr 12	Total Yr 10	% Yr 10 leaving	Total Yr 11	% Yr 11 leaving	Sample (n)
Berkeley Vale	35	75	12	200	17.5	155	48.4	2
The Entrance	56	67	10	215	26.0	153	37.3	3
Erina	23	64	13	133	17.3	96	66.7	5
Gorokan	18	69	13	258	7.0	na	–	3
Henry Kendall	47	70	16	196	24.0	165	42.4	1
Narara Valley	36	56	12	178	20.2	126	44.4	6
North Lakes	90	112	24	238	37.8	na	–	8
Terrigal	55	44	12	207	26.6	161	27.3	3
Wyong	51	44	16	191	26.7	120	36.7	3

Source: Department of School Education, NSW

Table 4.1 shows the schools from which the leavers came, according to the regional database. Its limitations mean that some schools in the Gosford local government area were not included (e.g. Woy Woy, Umina and Kincumber) while Gosford is a selective high school with few early leavers. In fact, 20 leavers were from Gosford local government area postcodes (Gosford 14, Avoca 3, Terrigal 2, Woy Woy 1) and 20 from Wyong local government area postcodes (Wyong 5, The Entrance 5, Budgewoi 4 and Toukley 6). Two leavers were in a refuge. The newer housing subdivisions and low-income areas in Wyong were well-represented (e.g. Charmhaven 3, Gorokan 2, Blue Haven 4). The table also shows that proportionally more students leave during Year 11 than in Year 10.

Types of leavers

The young person's interview usually unfolded as a narrative of the circumstances of their leaving and its consequences. We found this 'story' more significant for understanding their transition than the specific answers they gave to particular questions about schooling, career advice, first experiences of work or the problems they encountered after leaving. We have therefore used the 'leaver stories' (appendix 2) to portray the circumstances surrounding each person's decision to leave school and to try and capture the way they managed the transition and its consequences.

Our conclusion is that it is not possible to determine from the leavers' current pattern of work or study that they are at risk of failing to make a transition to adult roles. This can best be judged by taking into account both th*e type* of leaver judged by the circumstances, and the *pattern of transition* that seems to be indicated in the leaver narrative. Our analysis therefore brings together two typologies which have been developed in the work of Dwyer and his associates. Dwyer proposes:

- six types of leavers: positive, opportune, would-be, circumstantial, discouraged and alienated (Dwyer & the YRC 1996, p.12)
- five patterns of transition: vocational, occupational, context, altered and mixed (Dwyer & Wyn 1997, p.5)

These are summarised in table 4.2. By using both classifications it is possible to 'allow for the diversity of experience associated with early leaving'. The leaver typology draws attention to the circumstances of leaving, while the VOCAM typology describes the patterns of youth in transition to adulthood (Dwyer & Wyn 1997, p.5). (We have excluded Dwyer's 'would-be leavers' from our analysis since these are 'reluctant stayers', not strictly leavers).

The leaver stories divide into two broad groups of leavers. The first group of students leave because they are highly focussed either on pursuing a vocational interest or in getting work in the youth labour market. For these young people, they are mostly clear about the transition they want to make and set about making it. However, there are other leavers who are not 'positive' and 'focussed' and who generally have found school a negative experience and, as it were, want to escape to a different life. For this second group of school leavers it is hard to find a motive and meaning other than this desire to be free of schooling. They are most likely to be at risk because they are least likely to find employment or further education or training that will allow them to make a successful transition to adult life. The typologies help to bring more sharply into focus the variations in these groups.

In applying these typologies, we have treated as a 'vocational' focus any leaver who is pursuing a definite vocational goal or interest, whether they are currently studying for appropriate qualifications or not.

Table 4.2: Classifications of early leavers based on Dwyer and the YRC (1996), Dwyer and Wyn (1997)

	Definition	Incidence
Types of leavers:		
Positive	Leave school to follow a career choice or take up a job in a preferred area of work	19
Opportune	Take an opportunity to leave school on finding a job or establishing a personal relationship	4
Would-be	Stay reluctantly at school for lack of opportunity to leave	–
Circumstantial	Those forced out of school for largely non-educational reasons such as need for income	6
Discouraged	Those who leave because of lack of success in schooling and whose level of performance and interest is low	8
Alienated	Similar to the discouraged leavers, but likely to be identified as behaviour problems, be suspended or expelled	4
Patterns of transition:		
Vocational focus	Leaver focussed on gaining qualifications to enable a career	18
Occupational focus	Give priority to work, subordinating other life choices	13
Context focus	Emphasise the 'life-context' chosen (e.g. family, lifestyle)	3
Altered patterns	Reconsider their original route and change their goals	1
Mixed patterns	Place equal value on a range of activities or goals	5

The positive leavers

The positive leavers mainly left school to follow a career choice or take up a job offer. The dominant pattern among these leavers is a 'vocational focus'. As table 4.3 shows, the 'vocational positives' are determined about pursuing their chosen careers. They have clear goals and seek to realise them in a single-minded way. It is striking how some of these young people, in fact, have organised their lives around achieving their vocational goals.

While these early leavers might be seen as those most likely to have the approval of their parents and teachers for their clear vocational directions in life, they number only a quarter of those interviewed.

The 'life themes' of these leavers illustrate some features of this career-directed early leaving:

- *Part-time work* and relevant work experience are crucial in their career moves. Leanne began working voluntarily in a hairdressing salon in order to learn the so-called 'beauty business' and win an apprenticeship. Steve was helped by his career advisor to get a part-time job as a meat-packer after work experience, and then worked hard to get the job upgraded, was overlooked for an apprenticeship and was only later successful.
- *A combination of work and courses* is important to most of these leavers. Before he left school to look for an apprenticeship, Geoff had both worked as a motor mechanic and attended an automotive TAFE course. Jilly worked on a local farm at weekends with ideas of becoming a jilleroo, and then found out about a private course in the country for which her mother paid the fees, but had to battle the school to attend it. Vince missed out on a promised carpentry apprenticeship, and then found a place in the pre-apprenticeship course.

- *A strong vocational interest* motivates these leavers. They decide a certain career is for them, indeed, some have made up their minds about a vocation well before the school begins to offer career advice and suggest vocational options (Jilly, Leanne and Geoff). Their goals crystallise and they can start organising in earnest well before the time of leaving. They leave to implement a career decision.
- *They may struggle with difficulties.* While some fall on their feet, like Melinda (offered full-time work in her regular part-time job) or Rod (who went straight into the family business), others have to overcome setbacks such as the failure to find work in their chosen field or obstacles placed in their way. Josh and Wes left to pursue apprenticeships in automotive and hospitality without success, but continue to look for related work. Len's hopes for a career in animal care (following work experience in the area) lead him to travel to Sydney for the TAFE course. Family problems have brought Jilly back home but she is determined to return 'out west'.

Table 4.3: Positive leavers—vocational focus

No.	Name	Type	Pattern	Work–study	Sex	Theme
1	Leanne	1 pos.	1 voc.	FT employed	F	Leanne was single-minded in achieving her goal of getting into the beauty business, and is now an apprentice hairdresser
16	Rod	1 pos.	1 voc.	FT employed	M	Rod always expected to go into the family business and left school to be apprenticed to his older brother
40	Melinda	1 pos.	1 voc.	FT employed	F	Melinda was good at school but left when her after-school job as a medical receptionist became full time; aims for a nursing career
23	Geoff	1 pos.	1 voc.	FT employed	M	Geoff has single-mindedly pursued his goal to be a motor mechanic, organising training and work experience before leaving school
8	Vince	1 pos.	1 voc.	FT TAFE	M	Vince was aiming for the building trade, missed his start but then found a place in a pre-apprenticeship course in TAFE
5	Steve	1 pos.	1 voc.	PT employed	M	Steve felt any trade would have been all right, but decided on butchery, worked as a meat packer and gained an apprenticeship
6	Jilly	1 pos.	1 voc.	PT employed	F	Jilly is overcoming barriers to follow a career on the land as a jillaroo, organised a course and work experience before leaving school
38	Josh	1 pos.	1 voc.	Unemployed	M	Josh left early to do Year 10 at TAFE, aiming to work eventually in the automotive repair industry where he has a part-time job
20	Wes	1 pos.	1 voc.	Unemployed	M	Wes wanted to do more practical things, to be an apprentice chef, started a food course but has so far missed out on the apprenticeship
21	Len	1 pos.	1 voc.	Unemployed	M	Len determined to pursue a career in animal care and is travelling to Sydney to study in this field while seeking work
24	Leslie	1 pos.	1 voc.	Unemployed	M	Leslie focussed on a career in the hospitality industry as a chef and is working hard to get an apprenticeship

Note: pos.=positive; voc.=vocational focus; FT=full-time; PT=part-time

Some of these positive leavers may be currently unemployed, but it cannot be therefore concluded they are 'at risk' of failing to make a transition to adult roles. Josh, Wes, Len and Leslie are unemployed or have been for periods of time but have a focus on their career that keeps them going, and the options are not closed off. However, vocational motivation is not enough to guarantee transition, and continuing disappointments could put them at risk.

In summary, some of these leavers are realistic about the difficulty of 'breaking into' their chosen field and have therefore made early plans to achieve their goals. The school seems to play a small part in these pre-vocational activities.

Other positive leavers

A second group also leaves as a positive step towards making an adult life (table 4.4). The 'occupational positives' differ from those with a 'vocational' focus in that their criterion of success is winning jobs rather than entering a particular line of work or career. Experience of the job market may spark a vocational interest and lead to preference for a certain kind of work.

Like the 'vocational positives', these young people show similar qualities of enterprise, motivation and persistence, but they differ in putting more of their energy into job-seeking, and more of them are employed full time.

However, there are other features of the 'occupational positives':

- *They are highly focussed on winning work.* They realise how competitive the youth labour market is and already have many of the qualities which employers want in young people. They know what qualities will give them an edge. Thus Melanie is a striking example of a 'work-savvy' young person, holding two to three part-time jobs, seeing herself as 'working hard and fast' and 'willing to learn' in order to prove her value to an employer. Her orientation to work is driven by a desire for financial independence.

- *Part-time and casual work* has been an important part of their lives for at least a year by the time they leave, and this experience often leads to a job offer. Ken had worked after school in a supermarket and took up a trainee retail manager position when it was offered because it was 'time for a change from school'. Nerida asked for more shifts where she worked and left school when they became available.

- *They favour short courses.* These leavers tend to use short courses to enhance their employability, and discount the value of longer courses. Apprenticeships and traineeships are somewhat remote from the work lives of these leavers. Thus June, although disappointed by mixed success in the labour market so far, has been trying to build up her employability through a 'patchwork of courses and jobs'. Julie was well-matched by an employment agency to her job in a pharmacy, and feels she is learning a lot on the job, but would not think of a traineeship unless her employer suggested it.

- *School is remote from their working lives.* What these leavers have learned about success in the workplace and their experiences of it seems to have occurred quite independently of their lives at school and whatever career advice they received there. They have learned from the labour market about the qualities that employers value.

Table 4.4: Positive leavers—occupational focus

No.	Name	Type	Pattern	Work–study	Sex	Theme
11	Melanie	1 pos.	2 occ.	FT employed	F	Melanie is very focussed on winning jobs, 'works hard and fast' and believes that being 'experienced and capable' is the key
27	June	1 pos.	2 occ.	FT employed	F	June was determined to gain skills and employment on leaving school, her life is a patchwork of different jobs and courses
32	Ken	1 pos.	2 occ.	FT employed	M	Ken impressed his supervisors in casual work and was offered a trainee manager position on leaving school after Year 10
33	Peter	1 pos.	2 occ.	FT employed	M	Peter really wanted to do outdoor work of some kind, did related work experience and found a full-time job through his football coach
4	Julie	1 pos.	2 occ.	PT employed	F	Julie was helped to get work as a pharmacy assistant by a local employment agency specialising in disability services
37	Nerida	1 pos.	2 occ.	PT employed	F	Nerida, working weekdays after school, asked her employer to work for longer hours, and she is now permanent part time
22	Dylan	1 pos.	3 con.	Unemployed	M	Dylan is dedicated to life as a musician, doing a music course at TAFE but managing to find work on the side
9	Paul	1 pos.	4 alt.	FT TAFE	M	Paul expected to work on the family farm, but the bank's foreclosure has forced him to build a new life, starting with TAFE

Note: pos.=positive; occ.=occupational focus; con.=context focus; alt.=altered patterns; FT=full-time; PT=part-time

There are two leavers whose patterns of transition are different again. Neither Paul nor Dylan are driven by either work or career motives. Paul (an 'altered pattern') left school to help on the family farm, but found this expected transition disrupted by the bank's foreclosure on the mortgage and subsequent itinerant work and family breakdown. Although he expected farming was to be his life, his other vocational interest was mechanics, and was promised an apprenticeship 'in town'. He has been forced to reconsider his life course and is now studying at TAFE towards his HSC. Dylan illustrates a 'context focus' or perhaps a 'mixed' pattern—a preference for a kind of lifestyle over work or career or a mixing of career and other transition options. Dylan's real vocational interest is the life of a rock musician, although he expects to find a carpentry apprenticeship to provide a steady income. He takes work when it is available and studies music at TAFE.

Opportune leavers

There is an element of opportunity in the decision to leave early. So far we have emphasised the positive motivations to pursue a career or find work as leading to the decision to leave.

Table 4.5: Opportune and circumstantial leavers

No.	Name	Type	Pattern	Work–study	Sex	Theme
17	Reg.	2 opp.	2 occ.	PT employed	M	Reg felt school was unsafe, there were fights and he made bad friends, and thought he should break the cycle by finding a job
39	Dale	2 opp.	2 occ.	Unemployed	M	Dale is waiting for entry to the air force, has organised school and work around his goals in life, active and self-motivated person
15	Jessica	2 opp.	3 con.	FT employed	F	Jessica found school a disaster after long spells in hospital for anorexia, and felt she needed a life with more independence
34	Gary	2 opp.	5 mix.	Work & study	M	Gary assaulted a teacher and was suspended. He decided an alternative was to enrol in TAFE Year 10 and work part time
18	Rita	3 circ.	1 voc.	FT study	F	Rita was unhappy and isolated at her new school and her truancy resulted in the school saying she should leave
12	Jean	3 circ.	1 voc.	FT TAFE	F	Jean disliked the school and found she was rejected after anorexia, and left for an alternative HSC path at TAFE
13	Harry	3 circ.	1 voc.	PT employed	M	Harry survived a chaotic adolescence, is rebuilding his life, working part time and as a volunteer, wants to be a counsellor
26	Donna	3 circ.	1 voc.	Unemployed	F	Donna left because she was bullied at school, has tried working but will return to school in order to get into childcare
35	Janine	3 circ.	3 con.	Unemployed	F	Janine just wants to be on her own with the baby, but feels caught in a violent relationship with her boyfriend
10	Sally	3 circ.	5 mix.	Unemployed	F	Sally is struggling with (undisclosed) problems and homelessness which have marred her attempts to study

Note: opp..=opportune; circ.=circumstantial; occ.=occupational focus; con.=context focus; mix.=mixed patterns; voc.=vocational focus; FT=full-time; PT= part-time

However, for the opportune and circumstantial leavers, particular events or circumstances have more influence on the decision to leave than other factors. While school might not have been really holding them, neither were there other motives strongly prompting them to leave. There were only a few leavers that could be classified as 'opportune', the test for which is a definite event that becomes an occasion for leaving (table 4.5).

- Their leaving is more by chance than by design. Although Jessica was a successful student, she found on returning to school after long periods of anorexia that her friends 'could not handle' the illness, and she also had 'problems' with her mother. She felt she needed more independence, and finding a full-time job in the city with McDonalds gave her an opportunity to make a different kind of life for herself, although against the advice of her teachers.
- Patterns of transition are more varied. There is more uncertainty about work and study options. Career options may be deferred until a better time. Dale ('mixed' pattern) exemplifies this, leaving school to participate in a challenging money-raising sporting event, deciding not to return and then moving in and out of work (paid and unpaid) and

study (at school and TAFE), while looking towards a long-range vocational goal of entry to the services.

- Schooling may have been a negative. Bad experiences may have been a factor contributing to leaving. For Gary, suspension after assaulting a teacher brought his schooling to an end, and set him on an alternative course studying at TAFE. Reg was not discouraged by school, but found it an unsafe and unsavoury environment and seized on a job to 'break the cycle', even though leaving has landed him in a different kind of cycle of finding and keeping part-time jobs.

The circumstantial leavers

The *circumstantial leavers* are those forced out of school for largely non-educational reasons including income, housing or relationship problems (table 4.5). A variety of circumstances triggered leaving for the half-dozen cases in the sample. These included early pregnancy and parenthood (Janine), eating disorder followed by rejection by friends (Jean), bullying and rejection by peers (Donna), a chaotic life in and out of school associated with sexuality difficulties (Harry), or homelessness and abusive relationships at home (Sally).

There is a thin but nevertheless clear line between 'circumstantial' leavers and the 'discouraged' and 'alienated' leavers. By and large these young people do not leave because they are discouraged *learners.* They leave because it becomes difficult or impossible to go on with normal schooling. They may be failing educationally, but this is not what forces them to leave. They may have stayed if they had received a greater measure of support from the school, friends or family.

The patterns of transition of the circumstantial leavers are varied, as might be expected. Some have clear vocational goals, others wish to work, others are experiencing a mixed transition.

For most of these leavers peer rejection or disruption of their social networks was a clear motivation for leaving. This reflects the importance for most young people of friendships and peer support in their schooling. Indeed, most of those interviewed said that among the 'best things about school' was their socialising with friends. These cases underline how crucial is peer support to the continuing educational participation of young people.

The circumstantial leavers have trouble establishing or maintaining their identities as students because they lack the necessary social support. After leaving they may begin to find that support particularly through TAFE alternatives to the School Certificate or HSC. This was expressed by all types of leavers who had experienced TAFE.

Some features of the stories of circumstantial leavers are detailed below:

- *Rejection by peers can prompt leaving.* Rita's father disapproved of her friends and moved her to a new school where she was 'isolated and unhappy', began to truant and was asked to leave. She has found an alternative way at TAFE. Similarly, Jean was a good student who returned to school after anorexia, was rejected by friends and resolved the situation by going to TAFE to do her HSC, although her peer relationships are still problematic. Donna felt bullied out of school but has decided to return to do her HSC in order to get into childcare.

- *Advice and counselling* have helped these early leavers. They have been able to re-establish a student identity as a step in making a transition to adult roles. Thus Harry praises the counsellors who have helped him survive a 'chaotic' period of his life, deal with homelessness, abusive relationships and drug use and work out an identity which includes options for vocational learning.

- *Parenthood* is a difficult way to make a transition to adulthood, as Janine's case illustrates. She acknowledges she is 'too young' to be a mother and is having to deal with violence in her relationship with her partner.

- *Problems at home* can affect schooling. A troubled home life, including abusive relationships, can force a young person out of home and school and then can continue to undermine attempts to define a positive student identity. Sally has been in and out of refuges because of undisclosed 'problems' living with her grandparents, later disrupting a difficult year at TAFE, but is now finding short courses helpful in building her employability.

Discouraged and alienated leavers

The discouraged and alienated leavers are discouraged *learners*, those who 'have not had success in their schooling and whose level of performance and interest in education is low' (Dwyer & Wyn 1997, p.12). They are likely to be failing in some or all subjects and to feel that school is a negative experience. The alienated leavers are likely to have been singled out by the school for their anti-social behaviour and regarded as 'problems'. They may feel that particular teachers have victimised them. Ray felt he was picked on, and described how his woodwork teacher 'ripped apart' a planter box he was making. Whereas the discouraged leavers are more passive in accepting the negative aspects of school, the alienated leavers resist or rebel. There were three leavers identified as alienated in the sample.

There are more males than females in the sample in these categories. They leave to escape school, sometimes after truancy and behaviour problems. Their experiences of transition have been more problematic and, in general, leaving has added to their problems rather than solved them. These leavers are likely to be more at risk than other types, and the work and study options are more limited—both in terms of their own expectations and what they experience in the labour market. This group is more likely to experience a range of problems and to need support services.

Reviewing the leaver stories for these groups of leavers, the following trends stand out (table 4.6):

- *Their patterns of transition are variable*, compared to other groups. While most have a vocational or occupational orientation, for others there is a pattern of being stuck in unemployment with few options. These leavers encounter more barriers to achieving their vocational goals, which may be unrealistic. They tend to pin their hopes for work on particular choices, which may be too remote to be easily achieved.

- *Transition is likely to be difficult*. While they hope the world of work will be more positive than school, their unsatisfactory schooling has given them few skills and robbed them of the self-confidence needed to negotiate a transition to adult roles. The earliest 'drop-outs', who were most in need of career advice or preparation, received little or none. Bill and Case—who left in Year 9—seem to be in this group, leaving school without any information or support from schools which were glad to be rid of them. In the main they have had labouring work or casual jobs that lead nowhere, but don't think there are many other options.

- *Apprenticeship is a goal.* For working-class boys especially, apprenticeship is seen as their best hope, although experience soon provides evidence of its scarcity, even in traditional avenues of recruitment. Thus Marty failed the entry test for an electrical pre-apprenticeship and then found the Army apprenticeship scheme had raised the entry age and requirements. In contrast, Buster was better prepared by his part-time work experience to enter the labour market, and only gained a plumbing apprenticeship because of his mother's business and family connections. Thea has expressed a vocational preference for hairdressing but lacks the necessary skills and confidence, and work of this kind is a remote prospect.

- *A vocational course assists transition.* Some of the leavers who identified a vocational interest are pursuing this through a course, and are clearly taking on a vocational identity. Jack is doing the music industry certificate course at TAFE, but has also been helped by a number of short courses. Belle has been influenced by her family of art-workers to settle on a fine arts course in TAFE. Thea's case shows how the short vocational course is an important means of exploring vocational options.

- *The TAFE general education option is crucial.* For this group of leavers, the alternative schooling offered in TAFE is an important 'second chance' and a means to making a transition. While this TAFE option is valued by all types of leavers, those like Shane highly value a chance to build up their basic skills through CAFE (the Certificate in Adult Foundation Education, Year 9 equivalent) in a more supportive environment.

- *Some are hostile to courses.* Not surprisingly, other discouraged leavers do not believe that qualifications are necessary to get work and, in this respect, are like those leavers following an 'occupational' focus. Thus Jason and Heidi put their faith in the personal qualities which they have found will get them work. Bill is relying on family connections to keep him in work and has not considered a course of any kind.

- *Experience of the labour force is discouraging.* After a year, some of the early leavers are discouraged by their experience of the labour market. Ray and Case are thinking of going back to school to do their School Certificate. Case thinks it will improve chances of getting an apprenticeship. This wish to 'start again' at school underlines the need for schools to have strategies to support early leavers returning to study for their likely vocational goals. It is also an expression of the optimism that these leavers maintain, despite discouraging circumstances.

Table 4.6: Discouraged and alienated leavers

No.	Name	Type	Pattern	Work–study	Sex	Theme
14	Jack	4 disc.	1 voc.	FT study	M	Jack describes himself as artistic by nature, has done a number of courses and is working towards a career in music while learning to live independently
28	Belle	4 disc.	1 voc.	FT study	F	Belle felt she did not do well at school, felt she should leave and follow a career in art and is enrolled full time in fine arts at TAFE
7	Marty	4 disc.	1 voc.	Unemployed	M	Marty was keen to get a start in a trade and was very disappointed when refused a place in a TAFE electrical pre-apprenticeship course
19	Jason	4 disc.	2 occ.	Unemployed	M	Jason 'got nothing' out of school and would rather work and learn on the job, thinks that employers value other qualities besides formal qualifications
25	Heidi	4 disc.	2 occ.	Unemployed	F	Heidi disliked school, and after leaving has gained and lost several jobs but remains optimistic, feels she has the drive, looks and personality
29	Buster	4 disc.	2 occ.	Work & study	M	Buster's mother runs a business, she supported his plan to look for work and helped find him an apprenticeship
31	Shane	4 disc.	5 mix.	FT study	M	Shane did poorly at school and finally 'pulled the plug' but has gone back to study Year 9 through CAFE, and greatly appreciates the support of teachers
36	Thea	4 disc.	5 mix.	Unemployed	F	Thea was advised 'not to waste her time' at school, has had several part-time jobs and done courses but would like to start work in hairdressing
3	Bill	5 alien.	2 occ.	PT employed	M	Bill left school in Year 9 after behaviour problems and no-one intervened. He knows the labour market has few openings but holds a job through his brother
30	Case	5 alien.	2 occ.	Unemployed	M	Case dropped out in Year 9 after wagging a lot, tried to return but left again, but hopes to do his Year 10 and find an apprenticeship
2	Ray	5 alien.	5 mix.	Unemployed	M	Ray felt picked on at school, was on 'behaviour levels'. Has had few chances of finding work and regrets leaving and hopes to go back if he can't get a job

Note: disc.=discouraged; alien.=alienated; voc.=vocational focus; occ.=occupational focus; mix=mixed patterns; FT=full-time; PT=part-time

Leavers at risk

A year after leaving, most of the young people interviewed retain a sense of optimism about their future. Their circumstances differ greatly, however, and optimism is all that some leavers have, while others have jobs or courses. The contrast between the different types of leavers that has been made in the previous sections allows us to identify those school leavers who are 'at risk'.

A judgement that a school leaver is 'at risk' can be made on the basis of both the 'type of leaver' and the kind of 'transition pattern' evident in their leaving stories. A school leaver is at risk if they lack a definite set of options they are pursuing either through work or study, or a combination of both (table 4.7).

A young person leaving school, on the evidence of those interviewed, is not at risk simply because they leave at Year 10 with a School Certificate. The positive leavers, by and large, are not at risk because they have a strong vocational motivation and strategies for achieving their work and study goals. Conversely, those who leave school in negative circumstances are more likely to be 'at risk' when they leave:

- before Year 10 or without their School Certificate
- without prior experience of part-time jobs and an understanding of what employers want in young people
- without clear goals for life after school and strategies to achieve these goals
- without motivation to persist in achieving goals, including a strong vocational interest or career goal

Thus, a young person who is going from casual job to casual job, or is unemployed, or lacks skills and is not taking steps to build their employability (or their lives in other ways) can be regarded as at risk. Short-term unemployment does not signify being at risk, but long-term unemployment does. Living in poor circumstances with housing, income, health or relationship problems, in addition to being unemployed, indicate that a young person is at risk.

Whether a person is 'at risk' is to some extent an arbitrary judgement based on their circumstances and experiences at the time of interview. It is also a judgement about how the young person understands and acts upon their transition difficulties. This 'negotiation of transition' can be illustrated by several cases that show some of the complexity:

- Paul (positive leaver, altered pattern) is rebuilding his life after losing the family farm and then becoming homeless on the Central Coast. He is in poor circumstances but not at risk—he is knowledgeable about getting jobs, has had some success in doing so and is enrolling in TAFE to further study through TAFE towards his HSC.
- Heidi was successful in getting an apprenticeship (in her aunt's hairdressing salon) and later a sales traineeship. She is at risk because she has not been able to hold her jobs, is unemployed and lacks an alternative set of options.
- Ray has had few positive experiences of work since leaving school which he experienced as alienating. He is unemployed and regrets leaving. He is unclear about his options, has been in trouble with the police and done community service. His mother is a sole parent and he has few positive adult role models.

Table 4.7: Leavers classified as 'at risk'

No.	Name	Type	Pattern	Work–study	Theme
20	Wes	1 pos.	1 voc.	Unemployed	Wes wanted to do more practical things, to be an apprentice chef, started a food course but has so far missed out on the apprenticeship
15	Jessica	2 opp.	3 con.	FT employed	Jessica found school a disaster after long spells in hospital for anorexia, and felt she needed a life with more independence
18	Rita	3 circ.	1 voc.	FT study	Rita was unhappy and isolated at her new school and her truancy resulted in the school saying she should leave
13	Harry	3 circ.	1 voc.	PT employed	Harry survived a chaotic adolescence, is rebuilding his life, working part time and as a volunteer, wants to be a counsellor
26	Donna	3 circ.	1 voc.	Unemployed	Donna left because she was bullied at school, has tried working but will return to school in order to get into childcare
35	Janine	3 circ.	3 con.	Unemployed	Janine just wants to be on her own with the baby, but feels caught in a violent relationship with her boyfriend
10	Sally	3 circ.	5 mix.	Unemployed	Sally is struggling with undisclosed 'problems' and homelessness which have marred her attempts to study
14	Jack	4 disc.	1 voc.	FT study	Jack feels he is artistic by nature, has done a number of courses and is working towards a career in music while learning to live independently
7	Marty	4 disc.	1 voc.	Unemployed	Marty was keen to get a start in a trade and was very disappointed when refused a place in a TAFE electrical pre-apprenticeship course
19	Jason	4 disc.	2 occ.	Unemployed	Jason 'got nothing' out of school and would rather work and learn on the job, thinks that employers value other qualities besides formal qualifications
25	Heidi	4 disc.	2 occ.	Unemployed	Heidi disliked school, and after leaving has gained and lost several jobs including an apprenticeship, but feels she has the looks and personality to succeed
36	Thea	4 disc.	5 mix.	Unemployed	Thea was advised 'not to waste her time' at school, has had several part-time jobs and done courses but would like to start work in hairdressing
3	Bill	5 alien.	2 occ.	PT employed	Bill left school in Year 9 after behaviour problems and no-one intervened. He knows the labour market has few openings but holds a job through his brother
30	Case	5 alien.	2 occ.	Unemployed	Case dropped out in Year 9 after wagging a lot, tried to return but left again, but hopes to do his Year 10 and find an apprenticeship
2	Ray	5 alien.	5 mix.	Unemployed	Ray felt picked on at school, was on 'behaviour levels'. He has had few chances of finding work and regrets leaving. He hopes to go back if he can't get a job

Note: pos.=positive; opp.=opportune; circ.=circumstantial; disc.=discouraged; alien.=alienated; voc.=vocational focus; con.=context focus; mix.=mixed patterns; occ.=occupational focus; FT=full-time; PT=part-time

Emerging issues

This section summarises some of the main issues emerging from the interviews.

Leavers and their backgrounds

Early leavers are known to be at risk where they come from disadvantaged circumstances. The socio-economic background of the leavers is reflected in parents' current employment (table 4.8).

There are no black and white differences between those leavers classified as 'at risk' and 'not at risk'. However, the occupational profile of the 40 leavers as a whole shows virtually no parents in professional or clerical occupations. The main occupations were small business owners or other managers, para-professionals, sales (mainly mothers), and tradespersons (mainly fathers). Ten fathers and two mothers were drivers, operatives or labourers. A third of the mothers were at home and about a quarter of the families had absent or deceased fathers. There are a relatively large number of single-parent families among the 16 'at-risk' leavers, although there are other 'better-off' families also.

Table 4.8: Employment of parents of leavers

	Occupation major group												Total
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**A**	**B**	**C**	**D**	**Total**
Father	5	1	3	5	–	1	6	4	4	1	10	0	40
Mother	3	–	4	1	–	8	–	2	2	1	3	16	40

Key: 1 Managers and administrators 2 Professionals 3 Para-professionals 4 Tradespersons 5 Clerical and related workers 6 Sales and personal service workers 7 Plant and machinery operators 8 Labourers and related workers A Employed, not stated B Unemployed C Not stated (parent absent) D Not in the labour force

The parents generally appeared to be aware of the limited options for early leavers. The great majority of parents were not in favour of their sons or daughters leaving school. They often stated that they should get a job, do a course or return to school.

Schools and early leavers

The time of leaving is clearly a significant occasion for the early leavers, but few schools seem to have in place a system for providing information to leavers about their options. Few leavers received an exit interview, with the exception of those who make trouble by leaving, when they might be referred to the principal. The career advisor or year advisor appears to have been the main point of contact and source of advice about options. It is clear that an exit interview ought to be standard practice, where leavers are given a folder or leaver's kit with relevant information about local jobs and courses, since it is at this point that they are very likely to be receptive to information and advice. Few schools provided any kind of referral to leavers.

Those who leave before the end of Year 10 are significantly disadvantaged in various ways. Those who leave without their School Certificate soon find this is a disadvantage in seeking jobs. Most career advice and work experience comes too late for them. Sometimes their departure is too sudden for the school to have intervened in any way, but there were some cases were it was surprising that the school did not act or contact the parents (e.g. Bill who left before he was 15). The discouraged and alienated leavers who depart under a cloud are least likely to receive a sympathetic farewell and relevant information, although they certainly have the greatest need. The contrast in the treatment of 'good' and 'bad' students (in both academic and behavioural terms) underlines the problem. The academically able were urged to reconsider, advised that they were 'wasting their lives' or 'throwing away opportunities', whereas the departure of the discouraged and alienated leavers brought no sorrow either to students or teachers. Their circumstances make it difficult to provide positive advice.

Among the most positive steps to assist early leavers is, therefore, timely information and counselling at the point of leaving. The related issue is that of the attitude of schools to returning students, since many of the less successful leavers were considering the benefits of returning to school. How far are schools prepared for young people to move back into formal schooling as older students?

Career advice and job preparation at school

Most leavers received career advice in Year 10 or previous years, including at least a fortnightly period in the subject. A few cited their career advisor as a key person, one (Steve, a trainee butcher) pointing out that the advisor had brokered a job for him as a meat-packer after participation in work experience. One event most often recalled by those interviewed was the 'career market' organised at a club venue on the Central Coast, although few seemed to mention specific outcomes from the activity. The interview asked the leavers whether they had been given specific information about jobs on the Central Coast, the expectations of employers and the kinds of courses locally available. Few could recall such information, suggesting either that it had not been given, or that the information had been lost on the students. Few said they had had any talks by TAFE teachers, local employers or the CES. Students did, however, recall *general information* about careers, including preparing résumés, role-playing job interviews and exploring the 'Job Guide'.

There are issues, therefore, about the place that specific information about local employment and career development should have, especially in Year 10, and how this can be related to formal learning within the curriculum in areas such as social science.

In the interviews there is a striking contrast between the formal curriculum and the vocational activities of the positive leavers—their goal setting, seeking of relevant part-time or voluntary work in the area, and search for relevant courses. While much of this activity occurs outside school hours, and it is the more motivated and enterprising students who organise such learning for themselves, it seems that the formal curriculum has few spaces for young people to explore their vocational learning. The positive leavers certainly grasp that these activities are 'learning' essential for their career development, and that this is not learning the school can provide. Thus their transition to adult life occurs largely irrespective of the career preparation at school, and sometimes in spite of it (e.g. the case of Jilly).

This 'gap' between the formal curriculum and the world of work does not stand in the way of the positive leavers, but it is clearly disadvantaging the discouraged leavers. It is very clear from the interviews that those who said they 'got nothin' out of school' might have got more if there were more 'spaces' for vocational learning in the middle-school years. This lack of relevant vocational learning leaves the 'negative' leavers with few resources to make their way on leaving school. As Dwyer and Wyn (1997) suggest, more flexible curriculum options would permit a greater exploration of vocational learning and perhaps reduce discouragement and alienation along with early leaving.

Employment experiences

The great majority of those school leavers who were currently working had casual or part-time jobs as sales assistants, casual kitchen hands or labourers. Work in retail businesses is by far the most common experience, usually part time or casual in nature and with a large retail employer. This is consistent with the large number of retail establishments in the Gosford area. There were a few jobs such as pharmacy assistant in small businesses. The building trades mainly offered odd labouring jobs. Most leavers had held a job of some kind, including those who were unemployed at the time of the research. Only three or four had never had any kind of work. At least two were doing regular voluntary work.

Among those who had full-time jobs, apprenticeships or traineeships, two boys were apprentice mechanics, one a plumber, one a trainee manager, one a landscape labourer. One was about to be indentured as a butcher in a supermarket, after a long period working as a meat-packer. One girl was an apprentice hairdresser, one a full-time medical receptionist and another an office skills trainee. One had lost an apprenticeship (Heidi) and one promised apprenticeship 'fell through' (Vince) and the promise of an apprenticeship after a year disappeared after an argument with the employer (Leslie).

The way in which these better jobs were obtained has some crucial messages for attempts to increase access to training for young people through 'New Apprenticeships'. These jobs were obtained either through family contacts or through part-time work or preparatory activities *while at school*. The leavers moved into full-time work and/or study from part-time jobs, usually in a highly motivated way. These leavers were already part of family or social networks that enabled them to make a transition to more secure employment—the family automotive business, the mother whose business contacts helped in getting a plumbing apprenticeship, the football coach who offered the landscaping job, the hairdressing start in an auntie's salon. Family contacts are also the main way boys from low-income families get casual labouring jobs. However, as the case of Heidi shows, it is possible to lose both an apprenticeship and a traineeship in the one year if commitment is lacking.

In contrast, the casually working or unemployed leavers have a marginal position in the labour market. They hope for the chance of an apprenticeship (traineeships are rarely mentioned) but have few ideas about how they can improve their prospects. The formal training system is remote from most of the leavers, who rely on short courses and on-the-job learning to improve their employability.

It is important to recognise the flux and change of the early work experiences of most of the leavers. There is a good deal of movement in and out of jobs, partly as a result of its casual and low-paid nature, and partly because of young people's changing priorities. A changing or ill-defined labour force status seems to be the norm for most. This is consistent with Dwyer's views of the negotiated nature of transition—it seems that young people learn about work through trying out what is available.

Job-seeking

There are a number of factors at work in the job-seeking practices of leavers. Some of these practices were outlined by those positive leavers with an 'occupational focus' who were most successful in winning jobs (the 'occupational positives'). These practices included having clear goals, knowing what personal qualities employers want, developing these through work experience, being determined and persistent and so on.

Again, the advice of family and friends is important for the successful job-seekers. For example, the young hairdresser had an auntie in the business who advised her on steps to take to get an apprenticeship. The auntie then organised a work placement for the young hairdresser to learn the business and in order to become known as a good prospect. Particular job-seeking strategies such as canvassing employers and responding to newspaper advertisements are effective for the determined job-seekers who have the personal qualities or skills and experience employers are looking for, but otherwise these activities are unlikely to be effective for early leavers. For the unsuccessful, including a number of 'discouraged leavers', the help of the employment and social security services (such as the former CES) and case managers is highly valued in preparing résumés, organising courses and work experience.

There are other factors which limit job opportunities for early leavers. Because of their age, some will not travel to the large and more diverse labour market of the North Shore (a comment from a CES employee). One leaver doing a building pre-apprenticeship could have been working in his uncle's roofing business in southern Sydney but would not move away from home. This kind of travel from isolated localities in the Wyong Shire is often impossible without a private car. Gender discrimination appears as a limiting factor in June's negative experience of work in a garage.

Courses leavers take

Most of the leavers had done one or more courses since leaving school. In fact, 13 had never done a course, although many have had systematic on-the-job training. Several groups of courses stand out, which are described below.

- TAFE general education courses provide an alternative to schooling, including the Certificate in Adult Foundation Education (Year 9 equivalent), the Certificate in General Education (Year 10 equivalent), and the HSC in TAFE. There were strong messages about how valuable this alternative schooling was, particularly from those leavers who felt they had been forced out of school by circumstances. This desire to return to or continue schooling is one of the strongest themes expressed by the less successful leavers.

- Short courses provided by the CES, SkillShare, the community college (through the adult and community education or ACE sector) and TAFE are found to be very useful by the leavers in at least two ways. They provide a training option for leavers whose employment prospects are bleak. Short courses targetting 'at-risk' youth such as the Help for Early Leavers Program (HELP), Get Started or New Start were generally highly valued by young people as a means of breaking negative life patterns, as well as building up their employability. Short courses are used by the positive leavers as a career development strategy, sometimes while they are still attending school (e.g. Geoff, the automotive apprentice) to give them an edge in the labour market. A few in full-time work used them to develop a needed area of knowledge; for example, Melinda's medical terminology course in ACE.

- Vocational courses provided mostly in TAFE are found to be useful. A number of leavers are enrolled in longer accredited (certificate) courses as a career development strategy, which they are combining with part-time voluntary or paid work. These include the fields of animal care (Len), building (Vince), fine arts (Belle) and the music industry (Dylan, Jack), hospitality (Wes) and office skills (June). However, TAFE local offerings are too limited for leavers such as Jilly who paid for a private jillaroo course in the country.

Given the current policy imperative to increase 'New Apprenticeships' for young people, it is again striking how the apprenticeship and traineeship system is, by and large, beyond the reach of these leavers. For example, the local group training scheme is not mentioned by these leavers and has had a negligible impact on the training opportunities of those interviewed.

Existing TAFE places in pre-apprenticeship courses on the Central Coast are seen as scarce and inaccessible, especially by leavers who have been rejected despite a definite vocational interest (e.g. Vince and Marty). Traineeships do not figure in the plans of any leavers, compared to the traditional hopes of apprenticeship held by working-class youth (Marty, Steve, Wes) but seem to happen to those who have the right profile (e.g. June).

A strong impression throughout the research was that there are young people with vocational interests who are not finding an outlet either in school or in the post-school education and training environment. There are too few options for most of these leavers.

Services and support for leavers

Leavers were asked about problems they or their friends had experienced and the services they had used. Some mentioned problems with drugs and alcohol and several said they had friends who had died from an overdose. The relative youth of those interviewed means that many were living at home with parents and were to some degree dependent on them, so that few reported problems with housing and accommodation. The difficulty in breaking into the job market is in the foreground for many of these leavers. Transport to job interviews is a difficulty in the Wyong shire particularly.

Advice early leavers give

Those interviewed made many suggestions about what needs to happen to improve the options for early leavers. This advice naturally tends to reflect their own circumstances, with positive leavers, for example, urging other leavers to be confident and persistent, and unsuccessful job-seekers suggesting that young people should stay at school, or not leave unless a job was lined up. Half a dozen had no advice to give. However, there are some important themes coming through this advice directed towards schools, employers, TAFE and other service agencies. These included the following:

- *Other young people* are urged to stay at school unless there is a job to go to; to finish Year 10 and gain work experience; to get advice and information about leaving before doing so. For those looking for jobs the advice is 'not to give up'.

- *Employers* are urged to provide more jobs, to notify applicants of results and to advertise vacancies. Leavers feel particularly that employers are demanding more experience for some jobs than is required for the position.

- *Schools* are urged to do more for early leavers; for example, 'to support kids who wish to leave for good reasons', provide vocational choices earlier and not restrict their choices until Year 11, and have career advisors help individuals to work out their options. Schools were also urged to provide advice about early leaving and 'be there' to talk to about problems, and to make subjects more interesting and 'do more for dumb kids'. The underlying theme of many interviewees was the need for schools to treat students as young adults rather than children.

- *TAFE and VET providers* are encouraged to assist early leavers. TAFE is urged to make vocational places more accessible, especially of the pre-apprenticeship kind.

- *Other agencies* are also asked to make a contribution. Leavers across the board emphasise the need for advice and counselling to help them make a transition. This includes information about job-seeking.

It follows that there are some clear messages from the perspectives of young people regarding policy and practice:

- The school curriculum needs to provide spaces for vocational learning in the middle years and, in particular, to have more flexibility to respond to learners at risk of becoming 'discouraged leavers'.

Schooling is clearly not providing many options for those learners who become 'discouraged' leavers, and who enter the labour market at a disadvantage compared to their 'positive' peers. It is obvious in our sample of leavers how lack of success at school is linked to labour market disadvantage. Some important keys are to be found in the kinds of vocational activities which 'positive leavers' organise for themselves to maximise their chances in a competitive youth labour market. They create their own vocational learning in the community by building contacts with potential employers, gaining skills and experience and developing personal qualities employers value. They develop transition strategies and succeed in making their transition largely despite the formal curriculum and career preparation received at school.

- Social networks and family contacts are important for young people to gain access to jobs and opportunities such as apprenticeships.

Family networks are also important in shaping vocational expectations and making choices about courses and pathways to explore. Leavers who lack a stable home life, who lack role models or whose parents are caught in a 'dole culture' or poverty trap may lack these contacts and not have knowledge of what is demanded of young people by the youth labour market. The positive leavers, by contrast, are advantaged by the vocational learning accomplished while still at school.

- The generic skills of young people, together with high levels of vocational interest, are pre-conditions for effective transition to the workforce.

The profile of the successful job-seekers indicates that generic skills are as important as specific vocational skills for effective transition. The 'personal qualities' which young people say make them employable often refer to key competencies such as communication skills, planning, organising and problem-solving abilities.

5 Employers and early school leavers

One key to the labour market experiences of Central Coast early school leavers is the views and practices of local businesses. The research, therefore, examined the kind of businesses on the Central Coast which employed school leavers, and what qualities the employers look for when employing a school leaver. How important are age, results achieved at school and work experience? What problems have been experienced with employing school leavers? What kinds of conditions would lead employers to take on trainees or apprentices?

What do employers think needs to happen to improve the pathways to jobs for school leavers and other young people? How do their views accord with those of early school leavers interviewed in the research?

During October and November 1997, 15 employers on the Central Coast were interviewed by telephone for between 30 to 45 minutes. The interview (see appendix 4) focussed on four main areas:

- the nature of the business
- views on employing young school leavers
- recruitment and training of early school leavers
- transition from school to jobs for early school leavers

The survey questions were designed to be open-ended and exploratory.

A wide range of businesses were selected for interview, taking into account the dominant industry and employment areas found on the Central Coast (i.e. retail and hospitality) and selecting employers known to the Central Coast Youth at Work Project. Thus, the employers selected might be regarded as being more conscious than other firms of the needs and characteristics of school leavers.

Businesses included retailers of clothing, books, lighting, vehicles and vehicle parts; manufacturers of textiles and food products; large department stores; and book publishers and wholesalers. They also included operators of tourist attractions and hospitality operations, some of which offer gaming, accommodation, food and beverage and conference facilities in the one complex.

In some cases the businesses were owned by a single operator or a family, and in others they were owned by multi-national corporations. The representative whose views were canvassed tended to be either owner-managers or company-appointed personnel or human resource managers. In all cases they were generous with their time in participating in the interview and genuinely concerned with the fate of early school leavers and the outcomes of the research.

The availability of work

The kind of employment available to early school leavers on the Central Coast is largely limited to casual work. Table 5.1 shows that the main types of work require low-level skills such as cleaning, stacking shelves, packing goods and food preparation. There also appear to be opportunities as sales assistants. However, there are limited opportunities in the clerical field and virtually no opportunities on the production floor in the manufacturing sector, as young people are not allowed to operate certain machinery in order to comply with occupational health and safety obligations.

Table 5.1: Work available for school leavers in selected businesses

Employer	Employees:				Apprentices	Tr'ships	Work available
	Total	FT	PT	Casual			
Tourist attraction	19	9		10			Sales, cleaning
Vehicle retail	37	Most		A few	4		Spare parts, sales, cleaning
Clothing retail	24	4		20		1	Sales
General retail	120	30	30	60	2	2	Shelf fillers, checkout operators
General retail	215	25	190	100			Shelf fillers, sales assistants
General retail	350	Few		Many			Sales assistant
Book retailer	24	1		23			Sales assistant
Distributor & retailer	130	The rest	4	15		3–5	Sales
Book retailer	24	1		23			Sales assistant
Distributor & warehouse	300	The rest		20–50%		2	Stacking, packing & clerical work (seasonal)
Large hospitality venue	393	152		The rest	Yes		Kitchen hands, clerical work
Large hospitality venue	311	139	57	115	6	1	None because of licensing regulations
Hospitality venue	25	3		21		1	In most aspects of the business
Manufacture		350		Few	2	7	None for under 18 year olds
Manufacture	680	50%	2%	45%	2	10	Not in the factory but in the retail section
Manufacture	550	240	20	160+	1		Not in the plant but clerical and retail work

Note: FT=full-time; PT=part-time

Employers report that there is very little expansion of positions in the full-time workforce. Positions are few and those who are able to secure these positions rarely leave them. Together

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with the kinds of available work this means that the best that most early school leavers can expect is a casual job.

Opportunities to obtain apprenticeships and traineeships are also limited and, when they exist, tend to go to young people 17 years or older. This may be because greater maturity is preferred by some employers but in some areas licensing legislation dictates an older worker. Statutory age limits regarding alcohol and gaming and the ability of the young to take on shift work restrict work opportunities for minors in the hospitality industry. In the motor vehicle industry a person has to have a driver's license to be considered for particular jobs. Elsewhere other organisations have their own in-house trainees and have therefore not taken up government-funded traineeships. The motive in doing so is possibly greater control of training and trainee development. Another factor that mitigates against the early school leaver obtaining a traineeship is that traineeships appear to be offered at a higher level of competence; for example, the trainee store managers employed by larger retail chains, for which a Year 12 leaver with an HSC is the preferred candidate.

Employers' views on employing young school leavers

Most employers say they employ early school leavers. Those who do not cite the legal restrictions requiring employees to be 18 years of age. Employers' experience with early school leavers is varied. Some have had no problems with young school leavers and put this down to their rigorous recruiting procedures. Others report a range of problems. Young people are inexperienced both at presenting themselves well and in dealing with difficult customers. They can display inappropriate behaviour such as 'laughing and joking in front of customers' and are often influenced by peer group attitudes which affect their reliability. Immaturity and difficulty in relating to older adults can make them unaccustomed to taking instructions and this can lead to disputes with supervisors. Occasionally low literacy levels and stealing are also a problem. However, young people can find themselves in jobs which they see as having few career prospects, and one employer observed that it is not surprising that early leavers have a low commitment to some kinds of work since 'no-one wants to be a checkout operator all their lives'. In some workplaces the award wage is so low for juniors 'they can get more at McDonald's'.

Employers rarely place much emphasis on the year someone left school and are generally not concerned whether school leavers have gained their School Certificate. Having declared this as a general premise, some employers suggest that having the School Certificate appear on their résumé can indicate a state of maturity. For some positions which require appropriate levels of literacy and numeracy, it can indicate levels of achievement.

What, then, influences an employer's decision to employ a young school leaver? Employers are primarily interested in the personal qualities and attributes which a young person displays. There is, in fact, no single 'attitude' to young people but a cluster of qualities which employers consider in judging the employability of a young person. There may be a hierarchy of requirements to be met before employability is considered.

- Personal appearance rates highly. As one employer put it 'we want to see if they care enough to have dressed appropriately'; for example, 'wearing shorts and chewing gum' does not put across a favourable message to a prospective employer.
- Attitudinal attributes are perhaps seen as even more important indicators than dress or appearance. Showing initiative, 'nous' and some analytical ability, a good work ethic,

reliability, willingness to work and learn, interest in the job they are applying for and ability to work in teams and with older people were mentioned. Activities that young people have done outside—whether they have done voluntary work such as Junior Red Cross, fire fighting, life savers or part-time jobs outside school—are often seen as indicators of a positive attitude. One employer stated that work at McDonald's is taken as a 'good sign'.

- Communication skills are also seen as important. In this regard the written application and the job interview can 'often tell you a lot' about the person. For certain types of work, especially as sales assistants, employers see a good personality and enjoyment of customer contact as critical.
- Availability and flexibility are considered, finally, as attributes which recommend a young person for a job, since this is what employers are looking for in a casual workforce.

Beyond these attributes, employers say they will recruit people only if there is a genuine vacancy in the organisation that needs to be filled—the test is whether the business really needs someone. They are less interested in wage subsidies and other incentives and more interested in someone who represents good value and has the right attitude and qualities. These qualities are not felt to be associated with government schemes aimed at getting long-term unemployed people into the workforce—where people are working under duress as part of a case management contract, often have troubled lives and are not seen as having the necessary interest and motivation. For the discouraged leavers identified in chapter 4 who have had difficulty breaking into the labour market, these are significant problems.

Recruitment practices and early leavers

Central Coast employers use a range of strategies to recruit casual labour, the most popular being on-site registrations and the use of internal networks and 'word of mouth'. A few advertise in the local papers or in the shop window, although some categorically state that they no longer advertise. The old CES was still being used by employers, and tended to be the contact point when they wished to arrange traineeships or if they had specific job briefs. One large manufacturer has placed its casual labour pool recruitment in the hands of a private employment agency.

Most of the larger retail outlets use a method of recruitment known as 'on-site registration'. Potential employees go to reception and either fill in a registration form or leave their personal details and résumé. This is then passed onto the human resources section, entered onto a database and, as jobs become available, people are called in for interviews. When the CES was used applicants were provided with a date and a time at which to appear for an interview and their punctuality and ability to follow instructions were gauged through this simple exercise. Some businesses take registrations throughout the year but go through a culling and interview process only once a year.

One business has a well-developed volunteer program, through which they offer young people an opportunity to get some experience in a potentially specialist field of work. The volunteer works as part of a structured program for one day a week for as long as they wish—in the past this has been anything from eight to 12 months. This experience can lead to full-time or casual employment. This is regarded as a proven technique for identifying potential employees. In addition, volunteers can gauge whether they have a genuine interest and aptitude in the field and whether they should pursue formal training in the area. The business now has a waiting list of volunteers and bases its selection on the written applications received.

Thus, what emerges from the interviews is that early school leavers who do not have active networks through which they seek work, at the very least need to indicate their interest and willingness to work. They must do this by approaching businesses, filling in basic registration forms and submitting résumés which present them in the best possible light. They need to demonstrate confidence and adequate verbal skills to show the employer that they have a genuine interest in, and commitment to, the job to the point of accepting volunteer work. These are the actions which set them apart from other job-seekers.

Employers predominantly rely on their own internal recruiting procedures in deciding who to employ. They have several ways by which they gauge the attributes of potential 'high-value' employees, beginning with first impressions.

- The first impression at an interview is seen as very important. One employer said, 'If I say come with me and they get up briskly, I know they are a thinker'.
- The reference check of past employers is seen as equally important, and can extend to contacting sites of work experience. Many employers prefer a verbal to a written reference as they feel they get nearer the truth. School reports and references, although helpful, are not seen as the primary source of recommendation.
- At the stage of lodging application forms, staff at the enquiries desk may make notes about an applicant's appearance and manner, according to one employer, and this information may be used in the culling process. Early leavers, therefore, need to be aware that they are being assessed even before the first interview.
- The views of employment agencies are valued by employers. They are sometimes requested to do the culling by way of a basic literacy and numeracy exercise and by telling applicants what the job entails. Two employers said the quality of the applicants they are getting through the CES had declined in the last decade, and applicants often contacted the employer as part of their agreement with the CES but failed to turn up at the interview.

There were many clues from the research as to how employers manage the job interview process to maximise its usefulness. Interviews tend to be face to face, short and straightforward. Basic questions are asked about why the applicant wants the job and what they can offer by way of past experiences or enthusiasm. One employer stated that they 'look at the whole individual, their interests, attitude and body language'. Another employer in the hospitality industry said she often insisted a parent is present so that they were fully conversant with the employer's expectations and the need for appropriate transportation to be arranged for late evening work commitments. If an applicant is withdrawn, unable to verbalise their views, allows their parents to do the talking for them, has little or no work or community experience, this can go against them.

Thus, it is clear that employer recruitment practices are multi-faceted and geared towards gauging 'employability' from a range of criteria and ensuring a match of employee and job requirements. It seems there is often a 'hierarchy' of stages or 'filters' for early leavers to pass through before being employed, of which an interview and probationary employment are the last. Many of the early leavers in the research were not aware of the more subtle aspects of the job selection process.

Training practices

Regarding training, employers are generally aware of the kinds of courses which will prepare early school leavers for their particular employment needs. Some of them felt there was no suitable training available and others mentioned TAFE traineeships, pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship courses, the Business and Retail Skills Centre and the Central Coast Community College, but were unaware of details or if the courses were still in operation.

Most employers offer fairly basic on-the-job training. Typically, this takes the form of an induction course which can extend anywhere from three hours to five days and is coupled with ongoing assistance and supervision from a buddy or mentor. The induction course tends to cover issues related to company policy and procedures and occupational health and safety requirements and it usually includes a tour of the workplace and staff introductions.

Do employers approach the employment and training of early school leavers with particular care and interest, or in ways which differ from other employers? A few felt they were different, in having more experience in staff training, quality assurance practices, the amount of detail offered in their induction courses, their flexibility, and their capacity to provide variety.

Given that the early leaver interviews showed that work experience can be a significant factor leading to jobs, employer attitudes to work experience are important. The research showed that employers have a mixed response to offering work experience for early school leavers. At one extreme, one of the large hospitality venues was strongly in favour, taking several students every week for 48 weeks of the year, and often recruiting from these students. At the other extreme, one of the large retail outlets felt that it is not possible for young people in schools on work experience to meet their standards of customer service. Between these extremes lie employers who participate in work experience programs to varying degrees. Some are involved in industry link programs, others are especially supportive of students with disabilities, whilst others have established relationships with local high schools including Henry Kendall, Gorokan, Wyong and Lisarow. Despite this, many schools do not recruit students for this activity.

Few of the employers we spoke to ever participated in career days at schools, although some recalled having done it in the past. Those who did saw it as valuable and successful as it 'gives kids an idea of what careers are available'. One suggested that 'perhaps career days should happen early in high school not when the kids are ready to leave'. This observation accurately reflects the views of early leavers on the timeliness of job preparation and career advice in schools.

Transition from school to work

In making the transition from school to work, employers identified a number of problems they thought early school leavers faced in terms of getting work. These centred on the notion of experience or the lack of it. Many young people have no idea about the world of work. They do not seem to realise that much of work is about personal interaction, chain of command, having a boss and accepting rules. They lack the skills to promote themselves, to use their life experiences and not just their academic record to sell themselves. This is critical when there are so many people in the labour market and so few jobs.

Lack of parental commitment and support and poor role models can undermine the employability of early leavers. Some employers saw 'dole culture' as a problem, and the perception that it is not worth 'working for $6 an hour when it is handed out for nothing'. It was seen that there is a current social emphasis on young people knowing their rights and ensuring that they were not exploited and that, equally, there are responsibilities young people need to be aware of.

In terms of staying in work, employers see early school leavers' lack of maturity as a major hurdle to their development as effective employees. They often do not succeed in holding a job because they fail to grasp that 'going to work is tougher than going to school', that they need to be prepared to do the interesting work alongside the mundane or even menial 'like vacuuming the shop or putting on the kettle'. In addition, they do not realise that patience is required in staying in the one position until another opportunity comes along. Pressure from friends who are not in work also mitigates against the development of reliable and punctual work habits.

Thus, employers have a set of beliefs about the ability of young people to contribute to the business. They value qualities of adaptability, application, fortitude and independence of mind—the very qualities which once might have been learned by working on the job as a young person. They are now seen more as essential qualities required of a young person starting a job.

While employers agreed that many of the problems that early school leavers face will be remedied as they mature, they offered several suggestions to overcome these problems which might, in the short term, improve the transition from school to work:

- Young people themselves need to improve the way they present themselves and their attitude. Training in job-seeking skills, like résumé writing, interview skills, personal presentation and self-promotion, is essential. They need to engage in community activities which will widen their experience and increase their confidence and develop their communication skills. As one employer stated, 'mumblers stand no chance'.
- Employers see high schools as having a critical role in job preparation. While they appreciate that schools cannot do everything, they particularly see a need to arrange more 'hands-on experience' for early leavers. A number of employers pointed to the success of the TRAC program which provides properly supervised, structured workplace training programs for Year 11 and 12 students. This was regarded as successful because it integrates work placement into the school curriculum and provides a 'space' for vocational learning.
- Work experience is not perceived as working particularly well. It is regarded as too unrelated to the kind of work that early school leavers aspire to do, and to their aptitudes. It is not perceived as a realistic form of preparation for the labour market.
- Governments need to increase the number of apprenticeships available and examine the possibility of providing employers with a subsidy to keep people on at work; and examine junior rates of pay in order to dispel prejudices about young people being used as cheap labour.
- A brokering system of some sort is required to assist the transition from school to work, and this may be best located within local youth agencies and advisory services.

- Parents are seen by employers as playing an important role in preparing their children to be responsible active future citizens. They need to take control and break the cycle 'where parents blame the government who blame the schools who blame the parents'.

- Employers have a role in communicating their expectations about the world of work. For example, one manager felt that there was an impression among schools and young people that retail work was a 'menial job which no-one could make a career of'. This kind of view could be readily dispelled if employers and professional associations regularly visited schools and talked about their line of work and inspired young people by recalling experiences of transition to work. Career markets are not a substitute for this kind of activity.

Employers felt that there are many opportunities for young people on the Central Coast to make a transition to full-time work after leaving school, despite the fact that on the surface there appears to be only casual, low-skilled work available for early school leavers. Some of the employers interviewed who were early school leavers saw themselves as role models. Others referred to success stories which include a cleaner who went on to be a successful service manager, a TRAC graduate who is now the manager of a large retail store and a financial controller who left school in Year 10. What these individuals had in common were personal qualities of confidence, persistence and a work ethic.

The views of employers can be compared to how early leavers themselves understand the labour market and employer attitudes. The following points are clear:

- Those early leavers who are successful job-seekers (especially the 'occupational positives') have a good understanding of what employers are looking for in young workers. They are accurate in believing that employers value personal qualities, appearance and communication skills.

- Those early leavers who are unsuccessful in the labour market may underestimate how important personal qualities are and may not appreciate that other out-of-school experiences, including voluntary work and community activities, may count with prospective employers. They therefore need to promote their skills and abilities and relevant experiences to employers.

- Most early leavers and possibly their parents and teachers will underestimate the range of ways in which employers gauge the worth of a young person as a prospective employee, especially in larger companies. Although they may correctly understand that social networks are important in getting job openings, they may not appreciate that there is a 'hierarchy of practices' for sorting out the best prospects for jobs in a very selective youth labour market.

- Employers' views on the role of schools in job preparation agree with those of early leavers, especially in regard to the inadequacy of current concepts of work experience and the lack of flexibility in curriculum options in the earlier high school years.

6 Service provider perceptions

Over a period of three weeks during December 1997, 15 Central Coast providers of services to early school leavers were interviewed for between 40–60 minutes by telephone. An interview schedule (see appendix 5) focussed on six main areas—the nature of the service; views on early leavers' needs and problems; transition from school to jobs for early school leavers; perception of leavers' labour market experiences; vocational and training opportunities; and recommendations. The interview questions were designed to be open ended and exploratory. Service providers who were interviewed included schools, TAFE institutes, government employment agencies and private service providers.

The representative from each of the service providers whose views were canvassed varied depending on the service. In the case of schools, they were the career advisors. In the case of TAFE, they were co-ordinators within the Business Development Units, which currently have carriage for a range of programs including labour market programs. In the case of government and private providers, they tended to be managers or program co-ordinators. As was the case with employers, service providers were also most generous with their time in participating in the interviews and genuinely concerned with the fate of early school leavers and the outcomes of the research.

In summarising the views of service providers it is important to acknowledge that unlike employers who are essentially in business to make a profit, service providers can have quite different agendas, which lie under the wider umbrella of youth employment. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the different services for young people and how they perceive their role in relation to the needs of early school leavers making the transition from school to work. There is no intention to elaborate in detail the nature of every service canvassed.

The nature of the services

The tables below are indicative of the kind of programs being offered on the Central Coast. This is based on information provided during interviews and is meant to be representative rather than exhaustive.

Service providers can be grouped as government (table 6.1) or community and private agencies (table 6.2).

Table 6.1: Typical services provided by government agencies

Provider	Services	Description	Notes
Schools	Career Education	Offered in Yr 10 for one period a week all year. Covers all aspects of preparing for work and further study	Varies from school to school. May be offered for half a year in Yr 9
TAFE institutes	Get Skilled	State-funded, free courses, for 16 years and above. Each course individually tailored around different industry areas e.g. office skills, retail, concrete. Range from two weeks to a semester	Have a vocational and job-seeking component. Need to be registered as unemployed for 6 months to be eligible for a place
TAFE	Certificate Adult Foundation Education (CAFE)	Year 9 equivalent. Originally set up for mature-age students but has been accessed by school leavers.	
	Certificate of General Education (CGE)	Equivalent of Year 10	Need to be 17 years to access this course
	Apprenticeship Training	Provided either through part-time attendance as a statutory requirement, or through pre-apprenticeship courses	
	Traineeships	Entry-level training. A year in duration. Has a work and training component. Provides nationally accredited skills	
CES (now defunct)	General employment assistance	Case management. Provides a job listings database	Youth Access Centre and youth access staff transferred to CentreLink

Table 6.2: Typical services provided by private and community providers

Workwise (community not-for-profit company, ex-SkillShare)	Pathways program	Assists early school leavers who are at risk by providing them with support and assistance
Personnel Attention (private company)	Provides job preparation activities and career advice	Tenders for a range of government programs such as Job Club
Central Coast Group Training (not-for-profit private company)	Group Training	Employs apprentices and trainees and leases them to host employers. Also provides fee-for-service training
Practical Employment Service	Offers job search services, work experience and work trial activities	Open to any person 16+ in receipt of a disability pension. Excluding those with psychiatric disabilities
Gosford Education and Training Services	Job Placement Employment and Training	Aims to find employment and training opportunities for homeless and at-risk youth. Acts as a referral point and provides counselling. Federally funded and won by tender

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Employment Transactions (community managed not-for-profit organisation)	Help Early Leavers Program (HELP). Aimed at providing employment and training opportunities for 14–24 year olds. This may include encouraging participants to return to school. Provides industry-related literacy and numeracy skills, interpersonal and job-seeking skills	Centred on basic horse management—participants receive a non-accredited certificate of completion
Gosford Youth Services Inc. auspiced by Department of Community Service	Advocacy service which runs youth workshops, camps and excursions, personal development programs, guest speakers and parent, carer and peer support for 12–25 year olds	Provides 'drop in' and youth centres

Educational providers

The way in which service providers deliver their services and the rationale for delivery can vary. For example, schools appear to have a wide brief to provide children with a well-rounded general education. With this brief they are charged to prepare children for the world of work and, in order to fulfil this part of their brief, schools employ a career advisor. However, the way in which schools carry out their brief has many variations, and there is a lack of consistency between schools in the guidance a student can receive.

For example, at one school career classes commence in Year 9. Students are taught for one period a week for half the year. They follow a structured program which is designed to get them to learn more about themselves and how work is organised. This lays the foundation for the course they do in Year 10. The Year 10 program is also a carefully structured program with a set curriculum and specially designed textbooks. This subject is allocated one period a week for the entire year.

In the first term students examine the options available to them, with the aim of assisting their decision-making. At the end of the term they go to a career market where they can be exposed to as many as 250 different occupations and 800 employers who come from Sydney and the Central Coast. Students also have an opportunity to find out about education and training courses and talk to government and private providers about study and work options.

In the second term, students participate in a week-long work experience program which is related to their interests and abilities. The preparation for this is intense and students learn to prepare résumés, portfolios and letters of application which are marked by their English teachers. They engage in mock interviews (previously conducted by a CES officer) and are interviewed and assessed by the employer with whom they are placed.

By the third term students are ready to start applying for jobs. They also look at educational pathways open to them and start choosing subjects for Years 11 and 12. In term 4 all Year 10 students are interviewed by the career advisor, starting with those who intend to leave, followed by those who are undecided and those who intend to stay at school.

This is an example of a carefully crafted curriculum which is rich in content. However, its success is dependent on the skills of the person delivering it and, more importantly, on students attending all the sessions. Students who have a high absentee rate or drop out of school before term 4 are likely to miss out on learning about educational pathways and their face-to-face interview. This is a likely scenario for some early leavers since students currently complete their School Certificate Moderator in August and can get permission to leave straight away. As one teacher put it: 'It's harder and harder to teach anything at the end of Year 10'.

This describes only one way in which career education is delivered in schools. Some schools start their programs in Year 10 and may not use the curriculum mentioned above. They may not participate in the career market and they may arrange work experience in a much more informal way at a different time of the year.

Often career advisors perform other functions. These can include co-ordinating the Joint Secondary Schools TAFE courses, the approved vocational education subjects or the industry link courses. In these cases their workload is enormous and teachers of other subjects who do not have the necessary credentials may be called in to assist. Career advisors are not counsellors and some schools have a welfare teacher who deals with students' problems. This is not a dedicated position and the welfare teacher usually has a teaching load and, when appropriate, refers students on to the career teacher or Department of Community Services or other agencies. There can, therefore, be a lag between identifying that a student has a problem and having that problem dealt with, by which time a student may have left the school and the career advisor has lost an opportunity to assist them. One teacher reported a huge drop-out rate in the second semester of Year 9. At this stage students have had little in the way of career advice or guidance, thus placing them at higher risk.

TAFE staff do not see themselves as having a direct brief to cater for early school leavers. They feel this group still needs guided control at a location other than TAFE where they can make the transition to adulthood. However, in general, their interest in young people is in providing them with affordable post-school options in education and training. They are not as tied to delivering set outcomes as per tendering agreements, or as concerned with running a business as are some of the private providers. Neither are they charged with placing people in employment. The latter issues are of particular concern to private providers and to government and community-based job support organisations, and are what primarily mark the difference between the service providers.

Perceptions of early leavers

Those interviewed seem to suggest that early leavers often have emotional problems at home which are not being dealt with. This may result in them 'playing up' or 'acting out' at school which means that they acquire a negative behavioural tag. In addition, they may not be academically inclined and are not enjoying success in the classroom. All of this, coupled with the onset of puberty, makes for a powerful cocktail. Consequently, students look for a way out, but are not sure what this is. School does not appear to have anything to offer so they begin to absent themselves. There is an illusion that work will solve their problems. However, they are unfocussed, and often not work-ready because they have missed the career classes. They also tend to have poor networks through which to access work. This is a recipe for failure in the world of work.

In addition to this, some providers felt that schools are not very good at giving young people a realistic picture of what is required in the labour market. This was felt to be partly because many teachers had done little else but teach and partly because some of the career teachers lacked up-to-date knowledge of employment conditions and work opportunities and were not able or willing to obtain this information.

All providers appeared to hold in common a number of views regarding the needs and problems of school leavers. The following were seen as the main reasons for young people leaving school early:

- low self-esteem, literacy and numeracy problems, learning difficulties and general lack of social skills. 'Many have only ever been to school and have never done anything else like music, scouts, etc. and they lack living skills'
- dysfunctional families and the associated problems which can accompany them. An extreme example is that of a young person coming home to find his mother dead from a drug overdose
- poor or no role models and no work ethic—a result of trans-generational unemployment; 'the school system has failed them so they are distrustful of the system'

Less frequently, the providers made observations about other problems early leavers face. These include discrimination on the basis of their age and presumed characteristics, the limited availability of work except for low-grade jobs, and the possible abuse of wage subsidies by employers leading to short-term employment.

These perceptions accord with some of the early leavers' feelings about their treatment by employers, especially those leavers who are not positive and confident in their job-seeking. They accord with what is known of the kinds of employment for young people available on the Coast. They do not, however, accord with the perspectives of employers in regard to the factors which lead them to employ young people.

Perceptions of early leavers' labour market experiences

The table below summarises the general perceptions of each class of respondent to the type of work available.

As table 6.3 indicates, schools thought that early leavers get casual and low-paid work relatively easily in food and other retail businesses. However, this is likely to dry up as they get older. TAFE perceptions were that there were practically no job opportunities.

Table 6.3: Summary of perceptions of work available

Schools	TAFE	Government providers	Private providers
Casual and low-paid work in retail and food sectors	No or few jobs available. Casual, low paid, periodic. Highly competitive Nov–Jan	Opinion differed on the amount of available work but most agreed on the type of work available, e.g. hospitality and retail, mostly casual. Some perceptions that young people are used as cheap labour	

Both schools and TAFE providers felt that some employers expected too much of early leavers, they 'want a 16 year-old kid with a 19 year-old brain' as one respondent described it. There was also an impression amongst both government and private providers that some employers tended to use young people as cheap unskilled labour, as indeed they often are.

There was a perception that the period of junior work is used as a probation, after which the promising few are kept on, while the less promising are let go when they become older.

This view was countered by other providers who thought employers were very positive and were happy to employ youth and teach them new skills. In the main, all service providers share the view that employers were generally looking for the following qualities: reliability, punctuality, keenness and willingness to take instruction, mature interpersonal skills, employees able to travel to work without transport problems, people of 'good appearance' and respectful behaviour.

A number of those interviewed commented that school leavers may hold unrealistic expectations. As one expressed it: 'They think they can get a $35 000 job to start on when they lack literacy skills and they have no concept of starting at the bottom and proving yourself. They don't understand that you need to be prepared to buy the sandwiches when you're the new kid on the block'.

Most service providers, including schools, felt that early leavers had poor job-seeking skills. There was a shared perception of work being casual or short term. Jobs were thought to be primarily work such as retail sales, shelf stacking in supermarkets, 'yardies' who work detailing and cleaning cars, fast food, cleaning and food preparation.

Perceptions of vocational education and training opportunities

All providers were conversant with the training opportunities they provided to early school leavers and these are listed in tables 6.1 and 6.2. However, when asked what they knew about what else was available, their knowledge was sketchy.

Most providers agreed that there were few training opportunities for early leavers. Most of them knew about the TAFE Get Skilled (GETs) courses, the HELP program and the Job Pathways to Employment and Training. The Get Skilled course received the most recognition and the HELP program was also mentioned by a number of commentators,

Other alternatives mentioned were either apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships and traineeships, SkillShare and GETs courses. In addition, the 'Gateway to Careers' delivered by the private provider Personal Potential also rated a mention as a successful course based on the 'beating the cycle model' with an emphasis on personal development. The Central Coast Community College was also mentioned but few details were known about its courses.

Links between agencies, schools and TAFE

Given the above, it is not surprising that there are no formal links between agencies, school and TAFE. Whereas one school described links with TAFE and the former CES as 'friendly and warm', others felt that links particularly with TAFE could be improved and formalised. They considered it difficult to keep up with the many private providers who are springing up and felt that there was a fair degree of hostility emerging, particularly with group trainers.

In the new competitive market, many private service providers who are tendering for government contracts or those who have won government contracts are reported as constantly ringing up schools requesting statistics and assistance. They have an expectation that schools will find young people for them to place in jobs. This is becoming very onerous for the career advisors who feel they are not there to do the bidding of private employment placement agencies. They say they are happy to put up signs advertising the agencies but they are not prepared to 'hustle kids for them'. The schools also query just how many jobs the agencies actually have on their books.

TAFE also re-iterated the view that generally there were very few formal links between schools and TAFE. They felt that the average TAFE teacher wouldn't know many of the private service providers around.

The former CES felt that they had better links with service providers, schools and TAFE institutes when they had the youth access officer position. More recently, this position has been taken over by CentreLink.

One link that was mentioned by a few service providers is the one emerging through the Regional Development Corporation and the Area Consultative Committee—Youth Forum, which holds monthly interagency meetings. Another link is the interagency meetings held by the Gosford Youth Services. However, these are not attended by schools or TAFE institutes and there is a view 'that with increased competition between services which need to produce outcomes in order to keep their funding coming in, there's little reason to talk to each other'.

Strategies assisting transition from school to work

Counselling is seen as a key strategy by all service providers. As one teacher said: 'If I get to talk to them they often stay at school'. In the TAFE Get Skilled program, additional funding is provided for an educational support teacher who gets one hour per student per course to provide additional job-seeking skills. This is seen as critical to the success of the program.

The notion of mentoring was associated with the importance given to counselling. One service provider was of the view that 'what young people desperately need is nurturing'. An example of this can be seen in a job-search program that was provided by one of the schools. Essentially it is a mentoring program done in conjunction with the Rotary Club. Very experienced people from Rotary adopt a Year 10 student who is likely to be leaving or at risk. They meet fortnightly and work through what the student has done in the career class and how the knowledge can be put into action. Half the students involved in this program go back to school or go to a job, while very few do nothing. One student reported that this was the best thing that ever happened to him because it showed him 'how to keep trying and how to believe in himself'.

Aligned to this is the notion of the use of role models. Another school mentioned the Youth Enterprise Forum which promotes the notion of being in charge of your own employment future. A dozen students are selected from each school to go to it and be addressed by young people who have achieved success. The limitation, of course, is that only a very small percentage of students go to such an event, and these may well fail to include the kinds of troubled students who become discouraged leavers.

Another strategy that was seen as useful was the use of programs which combined hands-on learning and work experience with job-seeking skills. The Get Started program received high praise from many for doing just this. This State Government-funded program was offered in term 4 of Year 10 and provided participants with a week of job-seeking skills and three weeks of employment for which employers were subsidised. Students were still enrolled at school whilst participating in the program which was run by private providers at non-school locations. Getting out of the school premises whilst still officially at school was seen to be a useful strategy, particularly for those students who hated school. Reports suggest that the program enjoyed an 80 per cent success rate in the Gosford area; however, it no longer exists. Work experience itself is seen as a useful strategy. In fact, 85 per cent of young people rated it as the biggest influence on the choice of their Year 11 subjects at one Central Coast school.

Other programs which are seen in a similar light are the HELP program and Backpackers, a program which works with students with high absenteeism rates and behavioural problems who are considered to be at risk of early leaving.

Another strategy mentioned was that of the 'round-table', which involved bringing all stakeholders together in order to create a solution. This is exemplified in the Transition Education program, where the 'at-risk' student, parents, welfare teacher and career advisor come together to decide the best course of action for the student. As a result students are offered some choices. They may, for example, do a transition course at TAFE or attempt the Living Skills Certificate which is seen as an equivalent to Year 10; or they may use the services of a private service provider like Practical Employment to assist them in finding work. This model uses collaboration, consultation and counselling of the key stakeholders in order to devise the best possible action plan, and is seen as a useful model worth emulating for all early school leavers.

All providers assumed the importance of making information accessible. The Job Club run by the Youth Access Centre at the Gosford CES was mentioned by one teacher—they had used their pamphlets, videos and they had also visited the school. The career market is a similar strategy.

Private providers suggested several additional strategies. These included:

- demonstrating mutual respect using adult learning principles
- giving participants a statement or certificate—'something many of them have never achieved'
- working on an empowerment model and trying to 'get them out of a victim mentality and own their own choices'
- using personal development, and self-esteem building approaches generally
- using informal settings such as coffee shops for building networks and information sharing, advertising in places and events where the target youth attend (e.g. the annual Battle of the Bands)

A number of other ideas and suggestions came from service providers and these are included in order to record all outcomes from the interviews.

The following ideas emerged from the school sector:

- *The middle school concept* was seen as a way to address the issue of transition from primary school to high school as a precursor to dealing with the transition to work. Children are often alienated when they make their first move and this can be where the problems start. The availability of a middle school (Years 5–8), which places emphasis on group work and closer contact with teachers of the kind they had in primary school, could help to allay the alienation.

- *Evaluating the performance of career advisors* is an area which needs to be examined. Currently there is no evaluation of performance against defined competencies. Such an exercise would ensure that the best are retained and the reputation of the profession is enhanced.

- *Maintaining the career advisor position* is vital. The view was expressed that career education is under threat, and 'career education has become a dot point under the vocational education directorate, where the emphasis is on structured vocational training'. It was also considered important to devise better methods of reaching students before they leave school and to provide a full Year 9 program.

- *Better information on available services* should be provided, in that there is a need for a 'one-stop shop' to assist school leavers in the myriad of choices that exist.

- *Creating a safety net* is seen as very important. Although there appears to be a lot happening, the reality is that there is nothing at the bottom end of the market for kids, there is not a range of measures designed to catch the youth at risk if they fall into difficulties.

- *Youth access officers need to be retained*, because schools generally felt that the former CES had been more effective when they worked through a youth access officer. One person commented, 'I have not heard from the youth access officer in a long while'.

- *The exit portfolio* was also recommended. As references and certificates appear to be handed out at the end of Year 10, students who leave earlier in the year take little with them by way of skills or documentation. An exit portfolio could be prepared centrally by the Education Department and given to all schools. It could contain a number of generic items such as a check list of what a student should do before leaving school, a section on money, jobs, housing and so on. In addition, schools could add area-specific information on local services and pupil-specific information like reports, certificates and references.

There was also a general perception that there is only so much a school is able to do and schools are currently stretched to the limit of their resources. The view was that the main causes of problems are frequently outside the school and lie within the family, and there is often a desperate need for counselling.

TAFE sector workers suggested that there was a need for better parental guidance and support. They felt that schools really could not do any more and that '[problems with early school leavers] are a societal problem and what is needed is more parenting classes and helping parents'.

- *Protection of programs and staff* was also seen as a vital issue. The Get Skilled and similar courses need to be supported as there is talk that they may not be funded in the future. One comment was that there needs to be proper recognition and support of teachers who are involved in teaching these programs. They are often part time, seen as dispensable and viewed with disdain by many full-time staff, who make comments such as 'she's only an LMP teacher'.

The following are recommendations and ideas which emerged from interviews with private providers:

- *Preventative emphasis* was recommended, because it would be more efficient to concentrate program resources on prevention. The observation was made that this target group, in the short term at least, does not have voting rights.
- *The school curriculum* should include a more 'hands-on' and practical approach to teaching.
- *The work-for-the-dole* scheme should be extended to include people under the age of 18 years. One comment was that one of the worst things that young people can learn 'is that they can get money for nothing'.
- *Percentage targets for school leavers* should be put in place. Employment placement funding should include a quota for school leaver placements. The comment was made that this approach had been effective in the past (approximately four years ago).
- *A CentreLink youth specialist* worker needs to be provided. The perception was that since all the youth in the target group will need to access CentreLink for financial support, this was an obvious nodal point to trigger intervention strategies.

7 Towards an integrated strategy

This chapter is a synthesis of the various issues and perspectives which arose from the research including those from policy and the research literature, the regional analysis, and the views of early leavers, employers and providers in the Central Coast area.

The research was motivated by a need to develop an integrated approach to improving the options for early school leavers. No single area of action—the macro-policy settings; the provision of services and the need, demand and provision of services in the local area; the reform of the secondary curriculum and its better links to employment and further education—will, in itself, reduce the risks of early leaving. Rather, the key to positive changes, at least on a local level, is the way in which agencies work together to assist young people to make their transition to adulthood.

The problem for early leavers working out their options is the 'cracked mosaic' which presents itself, the lack of coherence or integration of options and services particularly at the local level. This is partly a reflection, distorted as it may be, of youth transition itself—part of young people making their move from the world of the family and schooling to the world of work and adult roles and relationships.

The strong conclusion of this research is that there needs to be a better integration of services to bridge these worlds and assist those early leavers most 'at risk' to make a transition. The research emphasises the contrast between two types of early school leavers. The first group is those 'positive leavers', who do this bridging often not much aided by the school, parents, service providers or vocational education and training experiences. The second group is the so-called 'negative leavers', who are the least prepared by their experiences of schooling and life and are most likely to fall between the cracks of employment, education and welfare policies and provision.

The question, then, is how the options for young people may be improved by a more coherent approach which enables the integration of services—so that agencies talk to and work with each other in developing better pathways for young people. This final chapter is a brief review of the import of previous chapters and concludes with a series of recommendations.

The importance of macro-policy settings

By the early 1980s, governments began to accept that the teenage labour market would not recover and that the economy would not be able to offer a full-time job to over 50 per cent of teenagers as was once possible. By 1985 the Commonwealth and State governments had recognised that an integrated structural response was needed. As a result of those and subsequent reforms, transition to employment policies and programs were by 1996 much more comprehensive, integrated and effective. More recent policy decisions have eroded the quality and comprehensiveness of provision and there remains a disturbingly large proportion of teenagers and young adults at significant risk of not affecting a successful transition to secure full-time employment.

To address the ongoing transition problems experienced by many young people, existing arrangements for transition from the compulsory years of schooling and through the post-compulsory education and training systems need to be refined and consolidated. Steps should be incorporated to integrate, articulate or synthesise the academic, general and vocational curricula. The schools and colleges have to be made more relevant and effective, and alternative forms of participating in education and training need to be developed.

The reforms of the past decade to the entry-level training system need to be further developed and consolidated, with a view to ensuring that there is an established quality entry-level structured training arrangement in place for all occupations/industries/enterprises. Transition to secure employment through participation in such a program has to become the norm for all young people who do not pursue further and/or higher education on a full-time basis. Realising this objective will contribute significantly to reducing the barriers to labour market participation experienced by so many young women.

Even if the above agenda for ongoing education and entry-level training reform is fully implemented, there will remain a need for ready and appropriate access to a full array of labour market programs. There will remain a need for remedial and preparatory courses and for many highly disadvantaged young people community sector structured training programs such as Jobskills, the Landcare Environmental Action Program (LEAP) and New Work Opportunities (NWOs) are often the most acceptable and appropriate form of assistance. However, while maintaining access to these programs there is also a need to ensure that pathways to the mainstream vocational education and training and higher education systems are created.

Case management for the most disadvantaged young people has demonstrated a capacity to deliver government services in an appropriate and effective manner, but this system has to be more adequately resourced. Moreover, there is a need to develop more effective means of co-ordinating case management systems to develop more effective transition pathways for early school leavers and other 'at-risk' young people. The restoration and maintenance of a well-resourced and effective public employment and training agency to work with contracted providers will help ensure access to appropriate quality programs for all.

One of the most glaring policy vacuums has been an apparent inability to develop an appropriate social policy stance in relation to teenage part-time employment patterns. While part-time employment has developed as a major activity for over 30 per cent of teenage full-time students, little has been achieved with regard to incorporating that experience in the generic and specific vocational education components of their school program. Similarly, the development and reform of entry-level training systems and labour market programs have, to date, failed to acknowledge and incorporate the part-time employment experience of both full-time students and non-students.

In these areas the present government's initiatives have been in the right direction. They have recognised the pressing need to modify the entry-level training systems to incorporate what is becoming a mainstream pattern of transition from school to full-time employment through a series of part-time positions in a range of industries, occupations and enterprises. Recent moves to recognise and address this issue in the development of New Apprenticeships have to be welcomed, but the related issue of income adequacy has to be addressed.

Last, it must be stressed that all these reforms are necessary, and their full development and realisation would go a long way to addressing the transition problems of 'at-risk' young people. However, they cannot in and by themselves address all the causes and effects of socio-economic and socio-cultural inequalities.

The research literature

Recent research thinking about early school leavers has developed a concept of 'at riskness' to refer to:

> *... young people who, beset by particular difficulties and disadvantages, are thought likely to fail to achieve the development in their adolescent years that would provide a sound basis for a satisfying and fulfilling adult life.* (Batten & Russell 1995)

Early leaving has come to be seen as a risky business for young people, particularly for those who leave before Year 10. Some young people are particularly disadvantaged by poor schooling outcomes resulting from the interweaving factors of gender, ethnicity, class and race and problems such as family breakdown, parental violence, transience, homelessness, substance abuse and truancy.

'At riskness' takes into account whether their life circumstances threaten a young person's physical, psychological or emotional well-being and limit their development.

Some groups of young people are much less likely to complete Year 12 than others—isolated children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, country region students, truants and homeless youth are the most vulnerable. Residential insecurity, and especially homelessness, is a major contributing factor to early school leaving. Those with poor numeracy and literacy skills have a higher chance of leaving school early, particularly boys. Type of school attended and certain language backgrounds are associated also with early leaving. Youth homelessness is associated with educational under-achievement and early school leaving.

Schooling also interacts with youth sub-cultures in ways that can diminish academic performance. Young people, particularly boys, feel under pressure to rebel against perceived control. This is exacerbated when the secondary curriculum is perceived as narrow and irrelevant. For young adolescent women, the research literature finds that their transition to independent adulthood is especially complex. They will experience particular difficulties which may be compounded if they are also Aboriginal, non-English speaking, working class, lesbian, physically isolated or disabled.

Young people who leave school early may have fewer chances to be recognised or validated through what they do, to establish a sense of purpose and achievement. They often need support in relation to their accommodation, employment, welfare and legal rights and responsibilities, financial planning and personal relationships. There are difficulties in finding pathways from school to work to help them achieve their goals. Unconnected and disconnected young people are vulnerable.

Early school leavers experience the sharply changed nature of the youth labour market, and full-time work with one employer is the exception rather than the rule. There is considerable after-school 'milling and churning' in a context of casual and part-time work, broken full-time work, working for more than one employer over a period of any one year and periods of searching for work.

Teenagers find employment in a narrow range of occupations often requiring little skill and offering little career potential, and their aspirations are often also limited to a narrow band of occupations, although there are marked differences between females and males in their motives and experiences.

The dominant theme from the research is that transition is very much a negotiation of options by young people. This negotiation of transition is not presently helped by a lack of clearly delineated pathways for early leavers, and finding a pathway was found to be more a culmination of factors than a conscious decision. Young people finding work do not necessarily stay in work or move into further education and training; other options included staying at home, going on the dole, becoming involved with illegal activities or a mix of these.

Thus there is a need for a greater integration of learning and experience under a protective umbrella so that these otherwise fragmented experiences might appear and be experienced by young people as a more coherent set of options, and less a 'cracked mosaic' of possibilities. There is a need to ensure that all young people, regardless of their academic achievement, are effectively connected to the labour market before they leave school.

Australian policy and practices do not compare favourably with international models. Swedish local authorities are obliged to take responsibility for all young people up to the age of 18, including those who have left school. A personal plan is drawn up for each young person not in full-time education or full-time work. Each plan must include elements of counselling, education, and work and is reviewed with the young person every ten weeks. During the period, possibilities for transition into regular education or permanent work must be examined.

Finally, it is far from clear that education and training options are becoming more attuned to the needs of early school leavers and some evidence that participation is becoming more difficult. The VET options for young people are often unsatisfactory for early school leavers, resulting in low levels of participation and success. There is a trend toward people attending TAFE from a higher level of schooling than was previously the case. It was particularly disturbing that the male early leavers in the study perceived trade training as a remote possibility. There is evidence that early school leavers may have increasing difficulty in gaining access to tertiary and training courses. Ensuring that they have good information about their options is a serious consideration for young people, their families and service providers.

Locating early leaving regionally

Early leaving is not the same everywhere. The circumstances of early leaving are affected by the locality and region in which young people are living. Regions differ in their socio-economic make-up, affecting the kind of jobs, courses and social services available to young people. There are lifestyle factors that lead people to move to an area and raise their families there, including the cost of housing relative to their income. There are socio-economic and cultural groupings which may influence young people's attitudes to early leaving and their expectations about work and unemployment, the value of education and training and so on. In turn, these and other factors affect patterns of local VET participation by the 15–24 year age group.

The regional analysis in the report highlights that the Central Coast is far from being socially or economically homogeneous. There are important local differences in educational, occupational and income levels which determine the opportunities for young people, depending not only on what local government area they live in, but what neighbourhood, say, within the Wyong LGA. Some areas are likely to be much better provided with services than others. In turn, service providers, employers and educational institutions have local knowledge of Central Coast early leavers and the options for youth in the area.

In certain areas, there were combinations of factors which contributed to adverse circumstances for early leavers: large numbers of young people reaching the end of compulsory schooling, socio-economic factors depressing educational participation, and pressures on local high schools.

This socio-economic variation implies that there needs to be targetting of support services within the region, that services need to be co-ordinated and integrated at the local level if many early leavers are not to 'fall between the cracks' of the mosaic of services.

Significant numbers of young people attending TAFE on the Central Coast do so as an alternative to schooling and to unemployment. Very young participants are very likely to be undertaking general education courses rather than a strictly vocational course. This raises the question of why it is that TAFE is able to meet these young people's general education needs but schools are unable to offer the same flexibility. It also points to the importance of building bridges between the general education that these young people receive in TAFE and standard school qualifications. However, it is also true that many Central Coast residents who participate in TAFE have a marginal labour market status, and that TAFE may be playing an important role in addressing the needs of disadvantaged populations described in the regional analysis. However, the data bear out the views of young males, particularly, that there are too few trade training opportunities.

Learning from leavers about 'at riskness'

The discussion of the leaver interviews contrasted the very different circumstances of various types of leavers. The two main groups include those who leave in positive circumstances ready to make a transition to work and adult life and those who do not, who leave without goals for post-school life, and are at risk of failing to make a successful transition to active adult roles.

The leavers' stories suggest that we need to understand early leaving as the leavers do—as a process that is negotiated and fluid, that 'at riskness' has to be assessed in terms of patterns of transition. Two points emerge clearly—first, there is no one model of transition, only patterns of transition and, second, the conclusion that an early school leaver is 'at risk' is dependant on their pattern of transition and their circumstances.

A school leaver is at risk if they lack a definite set of options they are pursuing either through work or study or a combination of both. Thus, a young person who is going from casual job to casual job, or is unemployed, or lacks skills and is not taking steps to build their employability (or their life in other ways), can be regarded as at risk. Short-term unemployment does not signify, but long-term unemployment does. Living in poor circumstances with housing, income, health or relationship problems in addition to being unemployed indicate that a young person is at risk. Thus 'at riskness' is a judgement about how the young person understands and acts upon their transition difficulties. But it is also clear that the risk that many young people face has been, in large part, constructed for them—by the failure of the schools and other agencies to meet their needs in an appropriate and integrated way.

What can be done to modify the circumstances of those at risk? It follows from our view that 'at riskness' is constructed for young people, rather than something that is inherent in them personally or in their circumstances, that our view of 'at riskness' is an optimistic one, which sees considerable room to move in improving options for young people. From the research, it is not possible to conclude that early leavers are automatically at risk through poverty or other problems but, rather, the significance lies in how they negotiate those circumstances. Our conviction is that a lot can be done in the school environment to modify some of the negative causes of school leaving. The most significant steps here are to adapt the school curriculum to the new conditions of the youth labour market and youth transition.

The school can take specific steps to help young people make the transition to adult roles including work roles, by providing flexible curriculum options that give more play to their vocational interests and develop personal qualities for employability by making linkages with local employers. At the time of leaving, the school should provide timely and relevant counselling and advice. When young people seek to return to school after negative experiences, schools need to recognise their needs as returning learners and young adults. Schooling is clearly not providing many options for those learners who become 'discouraged' or alienated, and who enter the labour market at a disadvantage compared to peers with more 'positive' patterns of transition. However, many of these positive leavers succeed in making a transition largely despite the formal curriculum and career preparation received at school.

Once in the labour market, the VET training system is providing too few places to meet the aspirations of young males for entry to skilled trades, where places are seen as scarce and difficult to access, although it does well to offer an alternative general education for early leavers. Short vocational and employment preparation courses are found to be highly beneficial by leavers without career directions. The challenge is to make sure that these courses lead somewhere.

Profiles of successful job-seekers seem to indicate that young people who have generic employment skills, together with high levels of vocational interest, are more likely to make an effective transition to work and life after school. 'Generic skills' refer to employment-related attributes (which young people themselves identify as 'personal qualities') which make them employable such as communication skills, planning, organising and problem-solving abilities. These competencies are as important as specific vocational skills for effective transition.

Understanding employer perspectives

Employers considered that there are many opportunities for young people on the Central Coast to make a transition to full-time work after leaving school, despite the fact that as a rule there is only casual and low-skilled work available.

Some of the employers interviewed referred to success stories which include a cleaner who went on to be a successful service manager, a TRAC graduate who is now the manager of a large retail store, and a financial controller who left school in Year 10. What these individuals had in common were personal qualities of confidence, persistence and a work ethic.

The views of employers correspond in many ways to what early leavers themselves understand of the labour market and employer attitudes. Early leavers who are successful job-seekers have a good understanding of what employers are looking for in young workers—personal qualities (discussed in the previous section) such as appearance and communication skills. They seem to have just those generic competencies valued at work.

Employers emphasise that early leavers may underestimate how important these personal qualities are, that the leavers may not appreciate that other out-of-school experiences including voluntary work and community activities are valued by employers. They therefore need to be aware of these aspects of promoting themselves to employers.

It was particularly clear that the recruitment of young people (especially in larger companies) is complex. Young people and possibly parents and teachers may underestimate the range of ways in which employers gauge the worth of a young person as a prospective employee. Although they may correctly understand that social networks are important in getting job openings, they may not appreciate that there is a hierarchy of 'recruitment filters' for sorting out the best prospects for jobs in a competitive selective youth labour market. Schools have an obligation to communicate this message far more strongly to their students and, particularly, to early leavers at the point of exit from the school.

The employers interviewed reflected common beliefs about the role of schools in job preparation. They believe that current concepts of work experience are quite inadequate for developing the personal qualities which contribute to employability and were critical of the lack of flexibility in curriculum options in the early and middle high school years.

Perspectives of service providers and educational agencies

Education and training agencies and other service providers, by their nature, offer different things to early leavers. They can differ in their modus operandi quite significantly, according to their service focus and orientation to youth, the kind of problems they deal with, current policy and funding pressures, as well as their organisation's history and tradition.

Part of the challenge in developing a more coherent approach is to bring together agencies which have such divergent views of their purpose and responsibilities. Funding limitations and cuts in particular services mean not only that there is a lack of resources to support—say, more youth counsellors at the local level—but also that these difficulties increase the pressure for demarcation of boundaries and the opening up of gaps in services for 'at-risk' leavers.

The point of an integrated strategy is, therefore, to create efficiencies but also to create synergies in youth services that have benefits for target clients such as unemployed youth.

Schools themselves put forward several suggestions for improving support for early leavers. There was a general perception that there is only so much a school can do and they are currently stretched to the limit, and that the main cause of the problem is beyond the school and often lies with the family. There was a view that the role of career advisors needs to be evaluated and redesigned in terms of well-defined competencies and given greater recognition. There was a need to devise better methods of reaching students before they leave school and to provide a full Year 9 program. Schools generally felt that the then CES had been more effective when they worked through a youth access officer.

It was recognised that students who leave early take with them little documentation, and that some kind of exit portfolio is needed, which could combine generic items with information on local services and student information such as reports, certificates and references.

Those working in the TAFE sector suggested that there was a need for better parental guidance and support. TAFE commentators felt that schools really could not do any more and that early leaving was a societal problem which required more support of parents. The short vocational courses that early leavers valued so highly were felt to be under threat, and undervalued in TAFE. Private providers felt that a greater emphasis should be placed on early intervention and program resources. School curriculum should include more practical approaches to teaching and learning.

Social security agencies stressed the importance of having staff dedicated to youth access, since youth in the target group will access CentreLink for financial support and this was an obvious point to trigger intervention strategies. Employment agencies suggested that employment placement funding should include a quota for school leaver placements as it had in the past.

Recommendations

The following are a set of recommendations that spell out what might be done to bring together the options for early leavers in a coherent way.

1 Discourage early leaving

> There are several things which can be done to prevent early school leaving in the first place, although this report has pointed out that in itself early leaving is not the problem. What emerges from the early leavers' experiences is the unsatisfactory school lives of the 'negative' leavers. This may point, as Dwyer has emphasised, to an inflexible curriculum which limits the ability of young people to explore a range of vocational interests and does not do enough to develop understanding of the world of work. The question is how might the school better cater to vocational interest, especially in the early years, and link curriculum more to the world of employment.

2 Manage early leaving

> There needs to be a better system in place for helping young people at the time that they leave. By 'system' is meant a range of strategies that come into play at different points in the transition process. (It is a process not an event). Schools need to provide proper exit briefings for early leavers, including advice about their options and the preparation of exit plans. The leaver interviews showed that it is alienated leavers who are most at risk, yet least likely to find the school helpful. However, any set of strategies falls down without a way of linking agencies which provide services for young people. This could perhaps follow the model in Scandinavian countries where local government provides a community base for such services and employs community mentors and career counsellors. Case management and youth counselling are elements highly regarded by early leavers.

3 Facilitate returning to school

> Returning to school is an option exercised by many early leavers once they experience the scarcity of jobs and reduced income support available to young people aged 16–18. As part of the 'system' or integrated approach to early leaving, schools need to include measures to provide for returners, many of whom return with the same problems with school work that might have led them to leave in the first place. These measures might include basic education support as well as better links to TAFE vocational courses. The

TAFE system is providing an alternative schooling for many young people who left early and who choose to re-enter full-time education in this way. One strategy, therefore, is to have closer linkages between TAFE and school in curriculum and qualifications. Again, the point is to widen the choices for young people who have gained little from their recent schooling.

4 Build school and employer networks and relationships

The employer study showed that job opportunities are limited by the region and its economy. Moreover, employers who recruit young people at all have quite specific requirements for young workers and definite recruitment practices. Thus, early leavers need to be given realistic information about employment and the labour market in their locality. This needs to happen throughout the middle years, not only at Year 10 or later. The best way this can be done is through better networking with local employers and their input into regular curriculum activities. The principle here is that experience of the world of employment needs to be incorporated into subjects and school activities, for example through regular visits by local employers, rather than treated as something to be handled as extraneous to the formal curriculum, for example through events such as a career market. This is an adaptation of the idea of 'the community as an educational resource'.

5 Develop effective area co-ordination

It is important to bear in mind that early leaving takes place in a local and regional context, where services may vary greatly on a scale between extensive and poorly developed. What needs to be provided for young people is (given the right policy settings) best determined at the local level. However, a major factor limiting the effectiveness of local services is a lack of co-ordination, the 'cracked mosaic' of services where the early leaver has difficulty in getting accurate knowledge of their options. A coherent approach can only be achieved if there is some way of bridging the disparate roles and functions, funding sources and service cultures of the agencies which young people encounter. This requires better co-ordination at the local level. This co-ordination would include bringing together employment, education and training with social services.

Area co-ordination committees have existed for some time and the question is how they can function to overcome fragmentation in services for young people. The guiding principle is that services for young people must not be compartmentalised. The idea of making youth counsellors and mentors an important part of the strategy could be linked to the area co-ordination initiative.

6 Overcome limits of poor resourcing

The effectiveness of local services can be limited by lack of resourcing for a full array of appropriate services for young people. Funding provision is determined by current government policy. The research found, for example, that young men are finding it difficult to get places in longer vocational training courses in TAFE, including apprenticeships, while significant resources are devoted to general education courses.

The primary aim of a more integrated approach is the articulation of clearer pathways for young people than currently exist. This is consistent with attempts to have school curricula weave generic workplace competencies into the young person's learning and orient learning more towards employability. Local employers would be engaged as a learning resource.

Schools would also shoulder more responsibility for monitoring what happens to their students after they leave. The local community would have a larger role, perhaps auspiced by local government, in helping young people negotiate their transitions to adult roles, possibly by having community employment and learning managers as they do in Scandinavian countries.

Such steps need to be under-written by government commitment to youth policy in areas such as income support, access to training places, and targetted support for particular groups. The over-riding need is for policy frameworks which reverse the trend towards fragmentation, isolation and loss of significance of youth policy. Structured pathways for young people, recognising a range of options since no single pathway can suit all, are needed to enable the changes.

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Appendix 1

The social policy perspective

This appendix provides a perspective on education, employment and training policy responses to school leavers. Throughout, the question of adequacy of the policy response will be addressed. The analysis will be informed by a concern for equity of access and participation and, more particularly, by a concern that past and present policies address adequately the needs of those young people who can be identified as being at risk in the transition to secure full-time employment and autonomous adulthood. The primary focus of the analysis is on national policy and program development, with a related but secondary focus on State policy responses.

Throughout, the analysis addresses schooling reform, vocational education and training (VET) and labour market programs (LMPs). While for most of the period under discussion the three areas have been the focus of relatively discrete debates and have been administered discretely, their histories have, in reality, been interdependent. Moreover, the long-term trend is towards a confluence of the three arenas, particularly in relation to teenagers and young adults.

Largely as a result of youth unemployment during the depression and in the context of the Second World War, most State governments increased the minimum school leaving age to 15 years—decisions which were not implemented until the post-war years. It was quickly realised (from the late 1940s) that universal lower secondary schooling necessitated fundamental curriculum reform, with the primary objective being educational relevance for all, without a decline in quality and standards. However, determining the nature of and implementing the reforms took over a decade, with the comprehensive reforms not really taking full effect until the 1960s.

The implementation of the Wyndham secondary education reforms in New South Wales's schools in the early 1960s, and the replacement of the Senior Public Examination for Year 12 students in Queensland by a moderated internal assessment system in 1973, were representative of the Australia-wide curricula reforms. Across Australia the norm was a comprehensive lower secondary school system in which the more traditional academic curriculum co-existed with a more vocationally oriented curriculum to provide what was seen as a general education for all. The traditional academic curriculum was retained for Years 11 and 12, which continued to provide academic preparation and selection for tertiary study for the minority.

Thus, the reforms were comprehensive in name only. Rather than synthesising the academic and vocational curricula to form a comprehensive general curriculum, the reforms left the two co-existing in the new comprehensive high schools. Schools as physical buildings and grounds, and the social composition of students in those schools may have been comprehensive; but the curriculum remained streamed.

Once in place and so long as the transition from schooling to full-time employment was secure, the reforms were broadly accepted, and the early 1970s saw a flourishing of liberal progressive education reform. The relative autonomy of schooling from the exigencies of the labour market was asserted as teachers, academics, educational bureaucrats and parent organisations proclaimed that the ideals and practice of general education were good in their own right. It was increasingly argued that the schooling system should distance itself from the instrumentalist tasks of preparation, sorting and allocation of young people for a divided and inequitable labour market.

The irony is that as soon as these changes were established, long-term structural changes in the teenage labour market began to undermine their appropriateness and acceptance. From the mid-1960s increasing educational participation rates contributed to a significant fall in the number of 15–19 year olds in full-time employment. The mid-1970s recession saw a further fall in teenage full-time employment and consequent increases in teenage unemployment and school participation rates. For the first time in the post-war period, there was a sense of uncertainty about the transition from school to employment.

The overall development of education, vocational education and training and labour market programs from the early 1970s can be divided into four periods, with the present period possibly marking the beginnings of a fifth phase. Those periods are:

- 1972–74, a period marked by full employment and ambitious beginnings for the Schools Commission, TAFE and labour market programs
- 1975–82, a period marked by recession, uncertain recovery and a search for ad-hoc band-aids to ease the pain of what were seen as temporary transition problems
- 1983–89, a period marked by the second recession, strong recovery, and a search for long-term solutions in increased education retention rates and training reform
- 1990–99, a period marked by the third recession, renewed economic recovery and moves toward an integrated schools, vocational education and training and labour market program-based transition policy under Working Nation, followed by cutbacks, Work for the Dole and further de-regulation of the structured training system under the Coalition Government

Optimism: 1972–74

The 1972–74 period was marked by an optimism which in the field of education found expression in a series of liberal progressive reports. These gave voice to the rising demands for the reform of, access to, and participation in, education and training. The Report of the Interim Committee of the Schools Commission (*Schools in Australia* or the Karmel Report 1973) presented the case for social democratic reforms based on equality of educational opportunities and outcomes, community participation, devolution and diversity, and liberal progressive curriculum reform. The Schools Commission was created and it provided a much more public and participatory counter to the traditional centralised bureaucratic policy development and administration system.

In the employment and training arena the social democratic mood found expression in the ambitious desire to set in place a comprehensive Active Man Power Policy (sic). A series of five reports relating to aspects of employment and training policies paved the way for the expansion of TAFE, the introduction of the National Employment and Training Strategy (NEAT), and the introduction of the National Apprenticeship Assistance Scheme (NAAS). The Report of the Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education (*TAFE in Australia*, or the Kangan Report 1974) broadened vocational training to incorporate further education, gave TAFE its name and established the framework for a major expansion of, and Commonwealth involvement in, TAFE.

NEAT was designed to provide universal access to non-trade formal vocational education and training courses, and subsidies for on-the-job training. Participation was open to people outside the labour force and female representation was strong. NAAS provided increased subsidies for employers of apprentices, in effect to compensate them for the wages paid for the time spent undertaking off-the-job training. These programs were designed to be comprehensive, but were supplemented by an additional two programs designed to address specific needs.

The Structural Adjustment Assistance Scheme was introduced to provide assistance to individuals displaced as a result of the 1973 tariff cuts, and in 1974 a small local government employment experience program—the Regional Employment Development Scheme (REDS)—was introduced for regions experiencing temporarily high levels of unemployment. The strategy was to upgrade the overall skill level of the workforce, to facilitate structural adjustment and to reduce our dependence on migration as a source of skilled labour.

Ad-hocracy: 1975–82

The 1974–75 recession saw the collapse of this comprehensive employment and training strategy. Eligibility for NEAT assistance was restricted to the unemployed, the period of training was restricted to a maximum related to their prior employment, and the level of income support was dramatically reduced. REDS was expanded rapidly to cover the whole of Australia and then disbanded in the 1975–76 budget. These responses to recession lacked coherence and there was an absence of any targetting, e.g. over 90 per cent of REDS participants were male.

The period from 1975–76 to 1980–81 saw a dramatic reduction in real levels of expenditure on employment and training programs and the ad-hoc introduction of a wide range of age-related programs, although with less expenditure than on the programs they replaced. By 1981 over 90 per cent of total program expenditure was earmarked for unemployed 15–24 year olds who constituted only 50 per cent of the unemployed. Structured training assistance was modified and the Commonwealth Rebate for Apprentice Full Time Training (CRAFT), the Group Apprenticeship Support Program, the Group One Year Apprentice Scheme, the Special Assistance Program and the Special Trade Training Program were introduced to replace NAAS. As REDS was wound down the first marginal wage subsidy program, the Special Youth Employment Training Program (SYETP), was introduced in 1976. This was followed in 1981 by the introduction of the Adult Wage Subsidy Program.

This period also saw the introduction of the forerunners of the present range of off-the-job training and personal support programs. The first such program for at-risk young people was the Education Program for Unemployed Youth (EPUY) introduced in 1977, and this was followed by a myriad of others such as the Experimental Training Program and the National School to Work Transition Program in 1979. The Community Youth Support

Scheme (CYSS) was introduced in 1976 to provide personal support, counselling and advocacy, life skill and vocational training, craft and work co-operative activity, and job-search assistance. These programs represented the first attempts by the Federal Government to influence the nature and provision of TAFE and non-TAFE vocational courses for the unemployed, but the new programs invariably concentrated on short-term non-credentialling courses.

In addition to these programs the Skills in Demand, General Training Assistance and Industry Training Services programs were introduced to provide support for industry-based training activity and industry training councils.

Throughout the period the predominant assumption among education policy-makers was that the 1974–75 recession had caused a temporary youth unemployment problem. It was assumed that all that was required was a number of short-term band-aids to tide us over until full employment was restored. These programs were accompanied, however, by a shift in the public debate over the content of schooling, with an increase in the number of attacks on educational standards and a number of reports urging increased vocational relevance in schooling for non-academic students. The (Williams) *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Education and Training* (1979) had relatively little impact on policies relating to schools and the three tiers of post-school education. However, it played a significant role in confirming the shift in the terms of the debate, by confirming the importance of the education–training–work links.

Rationalisation: 1983–89

From 1982–85 youth policies and programs were dominated by the political imperatives imposed by the 1982–83 recession. The rise in unemployment saw a rapid reversal of Coalition policies and the creation of the Wage Pause Program which represented the first attempt to implement multiple targetting in labour market program delivery. Its primary target was the long-term unemployed, but this target was overlaid by secondary targets which required proportional participation by age, gender, Aboriginality, ethnicity and region. The election of a Labour Government in March 1993 saw the replacement of the Wage Pause Program by the Community Employment Program (CEP). This maintained the emphasis on equity targetting and provided full program funding to participating government departments, public instrumentalities, local government bodies and community organisations. Disadvantaged unemployed people were provided with a job on a socially useful project for an average period of six months.

The new Commonwealth Government set in train a number of policy and program reviews relating to the post-compulsory education, vocational education and training, and labour market programs. The 1983 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Review of Youth Policy and the 1984 (Kirby) Committee of Inquiry into Labour Market Programs coincided with the 1984 (Karmel) Quality of Education Review Committee and major reviews of post-compulsory education undertaken by all State and Territory governments. These reviews marked the official recognition of the need for increased school retention rates and comprehensive mainstream reform of the post-compulsory curriculum. Existing income support policies were recognised as being inconsistent with the retention objective and the 1983–85 review of youth income support arrangements led to a commitment to reduce disparities between education allowances and junior unemployment benefits.

The Kirby Committee also recommended that a new entry-level structured training program, the Australian Traineeship System (ATS), be developed for occupational areas not covered by the apprenticeship system. While the report sought to retain the strengths of apprenticeship training, it also sought to avoid some of its problems (such as its rigid four-year training sequence, the cyclical fluctuations in recruitment, and the costs to the public sector). The structured combination of employment experience, on- and off-the-job training was to be retained but on a three-day, two-day basis, thus facilitating a shorter period of traineeship (a minimum of and generally one year). Costs were to be distributed among the three beneficiaries: employers, the trainees and society as a whole. Employers were to pay only for the time spent on the job and, accordingly, awards were to be discounted; trainees' contributions would be made through not being paid for the time spent in off-the-job training; and government was to meet society's contribution by funding the off-the-job training.

The ATS was seen by the committee as an integral part of the necessary post-compulsory education and training reform and it was hoped that it would ease the transition from school to work in the non-trade occupations. It was also seen as a means of winning recognition for the previously unrecognised occupational skills inherent in the non-trade areas. Given the level of occupational gender segmentation, it was seen as a step towards greater gender equity. The Kirby Committee believed that in time the two systems would be merged to form one more flexible structured training system, but believed that the establishment of the ATS was the essential foundation for that transition.

In addition to its recommendation for the ATS, the Kirby Committee advocated a major rationalisation of labour market programs. It recommended the amalgamation of the two age-based wage subsidy programs to form the one program, JOBSTART, with varied subsidy rates for people of different ages and unemployment duration. Similarly, it recommended that the various off-the-job training programs be integrated to form two age-based programs, the Youth and Adult Training Programs. Lastly, it recommended that the youth community support and advocacy elements of CYSS and the Victorian Youth Program (VYP) be integrated to form an Australian Youth Service, and that a new community-based program be developed to provide vocationally specific training courses.

From 1984 there was a greater coherence in youth policy, with the 1985 Priority One policy statement being the first attempt at developing a co-ordinated set of policies covering education, entry-level training, labour market programs and income support, and seeking to co-ordinate Commonwealth and State policies. Despite this, the actual implementation of the reforms was not as comprehensive as the reviews indicated they ought to have been.

In 1975 the Commonwealth and State and Territory ministers had adopted increased school retention targets as the main vehicle for resolving youth unemployment which, it was accepted, was the result of long-term structural change in the labour market. However, with the exception of the development of a few senior colleges in Queensland and the ambitious Blackburn Report led comprehensive curriculum reform process in Victoria, there was a general failure to address the need for deep structural reform of post-compulsory schooling.

This lack of willingness appears to have been fed by a lack of widespread understanding of the nature and depth of the problems confronting young people in the labour market and schools, and the lack of ability to weld together a sufficiently strong coalition to push the reforms through. In some States reforms were constrained by industrial issues (Queensland's move to introduce multi-purpose senior colleges); in others they were constrained by overt opposition from education conservatives (Victoria's reforms to the post-compulsory curriculum and Higher School Certificate). And yet in others, reform was constrained by a lack of imagination (New South Wales's identification of marginal reforms).

Despite this, there were some significant achievements which established signposts for the subsequent round of education reform in the 1990s. Joint school/TAFE courses were piloted, and there were a number of very successful local reforms which saw Year 11 students spending one day a week on structured vocational programs in the workplace. Programs such as Training in Retail and Commerce (TRAC) in the Hunter region of New South Wales demonstrated the potential of joint school and industry development of vocational curricula and in combinations of school and work-based learning.

The main direction of the Kirby Report's traineeship recommendations was accepted by the government, and in 1985 the Australian Traineeship System was formally announced. However, it was immediately burdened by the imposition of a hopelessly unrealistic target of 75 000 traineeship positions a year. Once again, the will and ability to implement reform did not match the identified need for reform. Many unions saw the ATS as posing a fundamental threat to the traditional apprenticeship system and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) insisted that traineeship positions be additional to normal labour requirements. The ATS was thus construed as a labour market program for the young unemployed and not as an integral part of the structured entry-level training system. Second, the continued provision of marginal wage subsidies for employers giving work to young unemployed people under Jobstart undermined the incentive to take on a trainee with responsibility for on-the-job training and making provision for off-the-job training. Last, the administration of ATS was centralised and relatively inflexible, and control of the curriculum was held firmly by the public training authorities, thus limiting the capacity to modify training to meet the needs of specific employers.

Despite these limitations, ATS was established in a number of industries and its existence did contribute to the development of a training culture which was able to embrace the much more ambitious Australian Vocational Training System in the 1990s. Union attitudes to modifying and extending the structured entry-level training system changed, as did attitudes towards industry involvement in, and even ownership of, vocational training. In addition, the Kirby Committee formula for traineeship cost sharing provided the basis for the eventual introduction of a National Training Wage Award.

Other Kirby Report recommendations were more effectively implemented. The Youth and Adult Training Programs were established in 1968, and in 1988 they were integrated to form the one off-the-job training program—Jobtrain. The integrated marginal wage subsidy program, Jobstart, was also established in 1986. A review of CYSS set in train in 1985 resulted in the creation of SkillShare in 1989 and the end of the CYSS program. By the end of 1989 most of the recommended program reforms had been implemented.

This period was also marked by an increasing focus on micro-economic reform and substantial restructuring of industrial awards. In the industrial relations arena the concerns were to reduce the number of unions, to rationalise union coverage of specific industries and enterprises, to break down excessive occupational fragmentation and demarcation, to multi-skill employees and to create articulated career paths. Both the industry restructuring and industrial relations reform agenda lent support to the need to upgrade the overall skill level of the workforce.

The ensuing debate on re-skilling Australia led to a renewed emphasis on vocational education and training. Central to this debate were:

- the need for industry to assume a greater responsibility for, and ownership of, training
- the need to move from a time-based to a competency-based training system
- the need for broad-banding of skills and multi-skilling to facilitate the development of a more flexible and efficient workforce
- the need to encompass gender equity considerations in the overall reform process
- the need to establish a new set of institutional arrangements to institute and oversee the emerging system

The overall force of these arguments had an impact on labour market programs.

As the economic recovery persisted into and through the mid-1980s, the counter-cyclical CEP was wound down and then abolished. At the same time Jobstart was also considerably reduced in size. The cuts to both programs were justified on the dual grounds that employment growth would address the problems of unemployment and that there was relatively little skill acquisition benefit from employment experience programs. Despite the overstatement of the case that employment experience programs failed to contribute to skill acquisition, the latter argument carried a degree of validity. However, the argument that the economic recovery would by itself reduce the pool of long-term unemployed carried no validity.

The preference for structured and formal off-the-job training was evident in the parallel increases in expenditure on these programs. Expenditure on structured training (apprenticeships and traineeships) increased from $110M in 1985–86 to $188M in 1988–89, and expenditure on off-the-job training services increased from $32M in 1984–85 to $124M in 1988–89. As Jobstart was cut, Jobtrain expanded despite post-program monitoring results which indicated that Jobstart was more cost effective in securing the employment of participants, and despite the fact that most Jobtrain courses were short and non-accredited.

Despite the increases in training program expenditure and in labour adjustment, industry training and Aboriginal employment and training programs, aggregate expenditure on employment and training programs fell from 1984–85 to 1989–90. These cuts were much greater than the reduction in unemployment and real labour market program expenditure per unemployed person (ABS financial year average) was cut by approximately 40 per cent from 1984–85 to 1990–91.

Reforms: 1990–97

As with the previous period, this period began with the onset of recession, a further collapse of teenage and young adult full-time employment opportunities, rapid increases in teenage and young adult unemployment rates, and correspondingly rapid increases in school and post-school education participation rates. Any lingering expectation that increased education participation rates would by themselves resolve the problems of transition to secure employment was dashed.

In another parallel to developments resulting from the previous recession, the initial response of government was rapidly to increase expenditure on labour market programs and to institute a series of enquiries to provide the basis for reform:

- the Australian Education Council (AEC) Review Committee on Post-compulsory Education and Training, *Young people's participation in post-compulsory education and training*, (Finn Report) (1991)
- the Committee to Advise the AEC and MOVEET (Ministers of Vocational Education, Employment and Training) on Employment Related Key Competencies, *Putting general education to work*, (Mayer Report) (1992)
- the Employment and Skills Formation Council, *The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System*, (Carmichael Report) (1992)
- the Committee on Employment Opportunities, *Green Paper: Restoring full employment* (1993)
- *Working nation: The White Paper on employment and growth* (1994)

The Finn, Mayer and Carmichael committees played key roles in the reform of post-compulsory education and training and in advancing the national training reform agenda. The Finn (AEC) Committee identified the confluence of purpose in general and vocational education and argued for the end of the English-speaking world's institutional and curriculum division between the two. It also argued for the development of a number of generic key vocational competencies, and for the development of multiple pathways for the transition from compulsory schooling to employment. The Mayer Committee developed the identified key competencies and the Australian Education Council subsequently agreed that the States would pursue their pilot implementation in the public and private school systems. Depending on the results of the evaluation of these pilots, the key competencies will be implemented systemically.

The Carmichael (Employment Skills Formation Council) Report built on the work of the Finn and Mayer committees and developed a framework for the creation of multiple post-compulsory education and training pathways. It also recommended the creation of an occupationally comprehensive Australian Vocational Certificate Training System for ASF levels 1–3 (and, in some cases, level 4) the synthesis foreshadowed in the earlier Kirby Report. It established a timetable for implementation and endorsed an ambitious set of education and training participation and attainment targets for the Year 2000.

While no State or Territory has moved to implement the full range of post-compulsory pathways, and while there is little consistency within and between systems, much has been done to make education and training provision more diverse and relevant. Most schooling systems have established a number of senior colleges, and all systems have introduced a variety of means for students to undertake a mix of traditional academic, general and vocational subjects for their HSC studies. These range from students taking TAFE courses at TAFE colleges or in their school or college, to students undertaking TRAC-type programs sponsored by the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation.

In some States provision has been made for the young homeless to pursue their studies less formally in youth refuges. There have been a number of attempts to establish effective frameworks and procedures to manage the transition from school of early school leavers, frameworks which include schools, the former Commonwealth Employment Service (CES), SkillShare, TAFE, the Department of Social Security (DSS), youth centres and community service agencies in the processes.

These reforms have yet, however, to extend to implementing the key vocational competencies across the curriculum in secondary schools, despite the success of trials at the post-compulsory level. Similarly, there has been no real indication of a will to effect a genuine synthesis of the academic, general and vocational curricula.

In many ways the lessons learned from the failure to implement the identified reforms in the period following the 1982–83 recession informed the 1990–96 round of post-compulsory education reform. Another lesson that can be gleaned from the failures of the late 1980s reforms is that while increased educational participation rates may absorb significant numbers of young people unable and unlikely to secure early employment, they will not prevent the eventual joblessness of a significant proportion of those young people—those who can be classified as being at risk. Their ultimate employment will depend significantly on their actual and perceived competitiveness in the labour market in the context of the prevailing level and composition of labour market demand.

To this end, efforts to integrate the generic or key competencies, employment experience and vocationally specific training with other post-compulsory studies will not only make schooling more relevant, but will also serve to break down any real and perceived barriers to their eventual employment. Similarly, efforts to put in place effective school exit planning and support mechanisms will serve to reduce the incidence of early school leavers falling through the gaps between services and support systems.

The reform and extension of the structured entry-level training system was also identified as an important strategy to enhance the transition prospects of all young people, and of young women in particular (due to their lower representation in the traditional apprenticeship system). To this end, expenditure on accredited entry-level structured training was more than doubled under Working Nation, and the apprenticeship and traineeship systems have undergone significant changes since 1990. As a result of the trend towards a competency-based training system and of recommendations in the Finn, Mayer and Carmichael reports, entry-level training was transformed between 1990 and 1996. The main elements of these reforms were:

- the initial development of one synthesised Australian Vocational Training System
- a move to competency or outcome-based, as opposed to content and time-based, curriculum, teaching and assessment. This system will incorporate recognition of prior learning and flexible delivery
- the introduction of a national training wage based on the Kirby principles of award rate of pay for time spent on the job, no pay for time spent in training, and the government meeting the costs of non-industry-based off-the-job training
- the inclusion of the Mayer key competencies in entry-level training curricula
- increased industry ownership of the development of vocationally specific competency levels and of training curricula. The concept of industry ownership and responsibility has been extended to embrace the development and implementation of Nettforce traineeships which are able to be delivered entirely on the job

- the development of a new set of institutions to guide, manage and regulate the emerging system—the National Training Board (NTB), industry training advisory boards (ITABs), the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), a National Standards Framework, a National Framework for the Recognition of Training (NFROT), and the subsequently developed Nettforce and its industry training councils

These entry-level structured training system reforms were being complemented by the creation of three counter-cyclical structured training programs: Jobskills for long-term unemployed adults, the Land and Environment Action Program (LEAP) for unemployed teenagers, and the New Work Opportunities (NWOs) Program for case-managed long-term unemployed. Jobskills and LEAP projects were administered by contracted brokers who organised six-month combinations of employment experience and related on- and off-the-job training, and NWOs projects were identified by CES area consultative committees and administered by the CES. Participants received a discounted training wage in the case of Jobskills, a training allowance in the case of LEAP, and a training allowance set at the level of the national training wage under NWOs.

Expenditure on formal off-the-job training was increased markedly from 1989–90 to 1995–96, with further increases projected for the subsequent two years. The increases also extended to Jobtrain, SkillShare and Accredited Training for Youth, a program which was introduced in 1992–93 as an initiative flowing from the 1992 National Meeting on Youth Training and Employment. Many of the Jobtrain and SkillShare courses were what have been called preparatory and foundation courses which included life skills, English language, literacy and numeracy, and so on. The remainder were vocationally specific courses and, where possible and relevant, they were fully recognised and articulated with the mainstream vocational education and training system. All Jobtrain courses were provided under competitive contracts from the CES. Referral to Jobtrain courses was largely by case managers and participation in SkillShare courses could result from case manager, CES and/or self-referral.

The other major area of reform and increased expenditure was the development of a competitive case management system administered by the Employment Services Regulatory Authority. In a relatively short period this system demonstrated a capacity to provide more effective support, job search assistance and access to appropriate labour market program placements than was possible under the previously existing system. It's effectiveness was, however, limited by the inadequacy of funding for case managers, and by the labour market program-driven approach to program placement rather than a client needs-based approach to program placement.

Despite the demonstrated effectiveness of the case management system, there are grounds for concern about the lack of co-ordination between case management systems at Commonwealth, State and local levels. One of the most urgent and difficult issues remaining to be addressed was the apparent inability of Commonwealth, State, local government and community-based agencies to co-ordinate and integrate their service delivery systems.

Appendix 2

The leaver vignettes

Early school leavers at risk: Leaver stories

The following 40 leaver stories have been given category labels for the sex, status, type, pattern, theme and trigger data. To follow is an explanation of each category.

Sex:	male or female
Sample:	employment and education and training status (FT = full-time work; PT = part-time work)
VOCAM:	refers to the classification in Dwyer's 'VOCAM' typology (see table 4.2, p.47 of main report)
Type:	refers to Dwyer's type of early leaver (see table 4.2, p.47 of main report)
At risk:	refers to whether the leaver is at risk of not making a successful transition into adult life through work and study
Theme:	refers to the theme that seems to sum up the leaver's circumstances
Trigger:	refers to the leaver's immediate reason for leaving school

1 Leanne

Sex: female

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Single-minded in achieving her goal of getting into the beauty business, now an apprentice hairdresser

Trigger: Secured an apprenticeship as a hairdresser

Leanne left school when she secured an apprenticeship as a hairdresser just before the last term in Year 10. A singular factor in her success was the work experience she organised for herself during the previous five months or so, after she had made up her mind hairdressing was what she wanted to do. She walked around the local salons, volunteering to help and one accepted her. She then worked there on Sundays from 9am to 4pm, wiping benches, cleaning brushes and mirrors, sweeping the floor and observing the work. Then a vacancy came up with another hairdresser she had put her name down with. Leanne was rung and offered the job ahead of other 'Saturday' girls.

She disliked many aspects of school such as competitive sport, public speaking and the 'boring assemblies', and most of her subjects except art. However, one teacher had encouraged her to try for an apprenticeship if that was what she wanted, and she received a range of career education during Year 10.

However, it was an older hairdresser friend who had advised Leanne to look for work as a salon assistant and told her how important it was to dress and look right because 'you're in the beauty business'. Leanne's boss expects that she relate to customers in a mature way and that her hair and makeup are done because 'nobody wants someone cutting their hair who doesn't look good'. She makes sure she is doing something all the time, looks around to see what needs doing and helps the hairdressers make things run smoothly when it is busy in the salon. At TAFE she is very happy and feels she is learning every part of the trade.

Although she recognises she has been successful in getting a job, she feels that other young people looking for work don't try hard enough or present well enough to be successful.

2 Ray

Sex: male

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 5 mixed

Type: 5 alienated

At risk: yes

Theme: His chances of getting work don't look good; he regrets leaving and hopes to go back to school if he can't get a job

Trigger: Picked on by a teacher

Ray left halfway through Year 10 before his School Certificate, because he felt 'picked on' by some teachers when he was on behaviour 'levels'. He wagged classes, especially woodwork where a teacher had 'ripped apart' a planter box he was making. He knows that training is needed for most jobs except casual unskilled work.

Ray had a week of work experience at a fruit supermarket where he learned how to stack fruit and use the cash register. He also had a part-time job after school collecting and stacking trolleys which a mate had helped him obtain. At school he remembers career advice, being told about jobs, taking a 'job test' and being given folders of job information. He learned that employers want school leavers to be punctual, reliable and of good appearance. In Year 9 they 'did interests' and job interviews and résumé preparation. Later employers came to the school for two days and each student had a half-hour appointment with an employer according to the job interests they had put down.

There is nothing in the way of local courses which interest him, and he has no transport to get to other regions where his interests are offered. Ray would like to do spray-painting or panel-beating or outdoor work in the construction industry. He has learned that he would have got some jobs if he had a certificate. Some friends are doing baking or auto-electrical apprenticeships and have suggested courses, and he has asked at technical and further education (TAFE) about pre-apprenticeship courses. He knows about SkillShare and other agencies.

Since leaving school he has had several casual jobs. He worked for a month on a poultry farm filling and sorting egg trays, and later for a week laying turf and repairing fences. He got both jobs through people he knew. He has been to court and got community service for being an accomplice in a car theft.

In October, he will lose the dole under the new rules for 16–18 year olds living at home, and his sole-parent mother will lose this addition to the family income. She has two other children younger than Ray and receives the sole-parent allowance. Currently he is still unemployed and his case manager is helping him look for a job, work on his résumé and find a course he can do, such as cooking, that will help him get a job in a local club. He says his chances of getting work don't look good. He regrets leaving and hopes to return to study if he can't get a job.

3 Bill

Sex: male

Sample: PT employed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 5 alienated

At risk: no

Theme: Already mature for his years, knows the labour market has few openings for kids like him.

Trigger: Just stopped going—had enough

Bill appears mature for his 16 years. He has been in the labour market since he left school halfway through Year 9 aged 14 and a half. He says he just stopped going to school because 'he'd had enough of it' in the lowest classes where 'they didn't teach anything'. He enjoyed primary school, but found high school 'boring and stupid' and the teachers dislikeable. He was on 'behaviour levels' all the time by Year 8. Although he liked and was good at maths, English and science, he reiterates that teachers 'didn't teach properly'.

The school, he says, did not contact him or do anything to make him keep attending. His father, a retail manager, was angry that he wanted to leave because of the poor job prospects. It was 'get a job or get back to school'. After leaving, Bill stayed at home playing educational computer games which his father obtained for him, waiting until he was old enough to get a job legally at 15. He left before there was any career advice at school. An older friend got Bill a job in her father's business casting cement garden figures but the work was hard and he damaged his hands and back. He was fired and moved on to other jobs including trolley boy at a supermarket and cleaner in a furniture factory. He left the latter because the staff sat around watching him work. He then obtained his current job in a furniture shop through a relative who is the manager.

After leaving his first job and being unemployed, Bill applied to TAFE to enrol in the School Certificate equivalent (Certificate in General Education [CGE]), but the offer of a place was withdrawn because he was too young. His main vocational interest at school was cartooning, labouring or a carpentry apprenticeship. Now he hopes to work in furniture retailing or as an offsider in the removalist business which is owned by the father of a friend. The friend has just obtained his truck driver's licence. He is more interested in working than doing courses, and has found that although most employers want at least a School Certificate, they value qualities like reliability, appearance and hard work.

4 Julie

Sex: female

Sample: PT employed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Helped to get work as a pharmacy assistant by a local employment agency specialising in disability services

Trigger: Got a part-time job

Julie left school at the end of Year 10 when she got a part-time job as a pharmacy assistant. She had signed on with a local employment agency specialising in disability services which she had heard about at her school, a service which appears to have been active in giving her advice about options.

Julie was rung by the agency late in 1996 and offered an interview. She was selected from about five others and asked to try the job for a week. The job is part time, five afternoons a week with optional Saturday work. She has been happy in the job and held it for nine months, and feels she is learning a lot about customer service, product information and pharmacy work in general. She enjoys talking to customers and working out what their needs are. She does unpacking, pricing, shelf stacking and cleaning. Her boss is pleased with her ability to organise her work and apply herself and says she is 'going great'.

She found most subjects at school hard with the exception of art. Her real vocational interest at school was childcare, which she learned about from a visiting TAFE teacher who said that the course was available in the local college. She then asked for work experience in a childcare centre for a week and learned about the demands and 'hassles' kids can mean. The employment agency in her advisory interview pointed out that the vocational qualifications required four years at TAFE, rather than shorter courses of the kind she preferred. She is happy with the pharmacy work but doesn't have ambitions for a traineeship and would not suggest this to her employer, although she would certainly do a course if he wanted her to.

5 Steve

Sex: male

Sample: PT employed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: He felt any trade would have been all right, but decided on butchery, worked as a meat packer and gained an apprenticeship

Trigger: Job after work experience

Steve wanted to leave school in Year 9 but did so at the end of Year 10 when a job came up through work experience in butchery at the local supermarket. Career advice at school was helpful with the career market and visits from TAFE. The career advisor helped him get a job by sorting out an issue involving the supermarket not taking people on because of problems surrounding the demarcation of store assistants and meat packers. He now belongs to the meat industry union. After work experience, the store put him on casual hours, Saturday mornings for four months. The job 'started real slow', but he made sure he was always there when they wanted him, to work quickly and so on. Another person got more hours, but she was fired for stealing meat. He was recently made full-time permanent and will be apprenticed in 1998 and go to 'tech'. His supervisor is teaching him about food presentation, how to do various cuts and how to talk to customers.

Steve just wanted to get a job because school had no interest for him. He felt any trade would have been all right and just wanted to earn money, but had his eye on a butchery apprenticeship after a career market. His parents agreed he could leave if he had a job, but otherwise he should stay on to Year 12. Most of his friends left at the end of the year because they were sick of school. A few were 'motivated' to look for work but most came back in February, and only a few are doing TAFE. During casual work he had spent four months looking for jobs, including cold canvassing local butchers, but found that the small shops are losing trade to the supermarkets and were not taking on anyone or were closing down.

He felt he was 'all right' at school, and liked woodwork and catering electives best. Steve had been in trouble in earlier years, but had settled down since the troublemakers in the lower classes had left. He thought getting into TAFE was being made too hard for most people like him.

6 Jilly

Sex: female

Sample: PT employed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Overcoming many barriers to follow a chosen career on the land as a jillaroo, organised a course and work experience before leaving

Trigger: Finding a course that was just right for her career plans

Jilly had a strong interest in working as a jillaroo (farm hand) after leaving school, which she found hard. She was ‘smart, but not too smart’. She set her sights on this career in Year 8, although she later found out from booklets that the nearest TAFE courses were in Scone in the Hunter Valley. She received little career advice with her chosen path after school. In Year 10 she managed to organise work experience on a local commercial farm managed by a family friend and mentor, on weekends for a year. There she learned ‘heaps’ about handling cattle, bikes, driving, fencing and farm maintenance in general. During Year 9 she had worked helping at a riding school but left when they expected her to go on without any reward except hard work.

Later she found out, quite by chance from someone at a career fair, that a private jillaroo course was offered by a farming family. This was a five-week live-in intensive course that was non-accredited and cost $2500. Her mother was supportive of her goals and managed to find the money. However, she then had to get special leave from school to attend the course and was required to complete all her School Certificate assignments in advance before she left. She feels the school made it hard and ‘there were dramas’. She had to prove she had a job to get her School Certificate, because she immediately gained work with a farming contractor for four months during which time she did lamb-marking, shearing, mustering and fencing.

Jilly had to come back to Sydney for family reasons, but later returned to the bush when offered a job on the recommendation of the family who ran the jillaroo training course. Although she learned a lot and ‘worked from dawn till dusk seven days a week’, she left after not being paid after a month’s work, returning to Sydney and going on the dole for two months before getting a casual job in a discount shop where she has worked since. In a few years she expects to be out west again. She thinks that schools should do a lot more to support people who want to leave in Year 10 for good reasons.

7 Marty

Sex:	male
Sample:	unemployed
VOCAM:	1 vocational
Type:	4 discouraged
At risk:	yes
Theme:	Keen to get a start in a trade and was very disappointed when refused a place in TAFE electrical pre-apprenticeship course
Trigger:	No, just left— knew he couldn't manage the high school certificate (HSC)

Marty's mother and father wanted him to stay on to Year 12 but 'he knew he couldn't' and they suggested he find a job. He says that most teachers said 'hooray' when they heard he was leaving, although one tried to dissuade him. Most of his friends have left because, he says, it 'was a group decision in Year 7 to leave in Year 10'. He is very keen to get a start in a trade and knows of one friend who obtained a carpentry apprenticeship through his older brother. He would have liked to get an electrical apprenticeship and had his eye on the Army Apprenticeship Scheme but this was put out of reach by a change in age of admission. The school had organised work experience at a nearby power station which Marty really enjoyed, doing a range of electrical work.

School didn't do much to help him on leaving, with references given to some people only. However, Marty felt he had learned a lot through career education about local apprenticeships, TAFE courses including pre-apprenticeship, and job-seeking skills. After leaving he applied for an electrical pre-apprenticeship course and did a test but was very disappointed to be refused a place in TAFE.

Since leaving Marty has had several jobs, one a night shift in a bakery, which he left after three days because of the terrible hours and what he regarded as a breach of faith on the part of the manager about apprenticeship. He has had odd casual jobs labouring with his father's friends and has applied for many more including canvassing tradespeople for apprenticeships without any success.

The Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) case manager has been very helpful organising job interviews and improving his résumé. Marty rates his success at job-seeking as two out of ten but says frankly that he is not impressed with employers who do not even bother to notify applicants about the results of job applications. He believes there should be more information available to young people about how to get and keep a job.

8 Vincent

Sex: male

Sample: FT TAFE

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Has an eye on a place in the building trade and found a place in a pre-apprenticeship course in TAFE after a struggle

Trigger: Job in the trade came up

Vincent left school in the last term of Year 10 because he was 'meant to have a job to go to'—a carpentry apprenticeship with a friend of his father who was a builder. He had planned to leave to go into the building trade after Year 10. Unfortunately, 'the boss' interfered and he missed out. He could have gone back to school but instead decided to try pre-apprenticeship in TAFE, passed the test but again missed out. He then got offered the place at Sydney TAFE. He has now finished stage 1 and is doing stage 2.

His parents, both of whom work in less skilled occupations, were unhappy with his decision to leave, but agreed to the TAFE course. No-one at the school tried to dissuade him. Over half of his friends have now left and are out looking for work. He received a reference from school and the career advisor told him about 'pre-apprenticeship' at TAFE. Otherwise, he was critical of the school for preventing him from selecting career options before Year 10. He liked woodwork, maths and technical drawing and wanted to do more of them. He says 'vocational subjects' should be available earlier. Career advice was mostly timed for 'a night at the end of Year 10', when leavers were told to do some work experience which he did with a builder, having organised it himself.

Vincent likes working with timber, and he would prefer to be building furniture. He could have had full-time work in Sydney working with his uncle on leaving school, but didn't want to be away from home, and he has occupational labouring work with local builders. He has learnt that employers in the trade want someone who works hard, can work fast and well and is able to communicate with other smaller businesses; nice large companies have other criteria and it 'comes down to who you know'. He says 'getting into something and finding where to start' is the problem and work experience helps make the contacts.

He is glad to have had the 'different life' after school, having money, travelling, meeting older people and knowing what the workplace expects but he regrets losing contact with his friends. In two years he wants to be working and 'saving' as a carpenter, earning good money like one of his friends who is a 'sprinkler fitter' with a big company.

9 Paul

Sex: male

Sample: FT TAFE

VOCAM: 3 contextual

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Expected to work on the family farm, but the bank's foreclosure changed that and he has had to build a new life, starting with TAFE

Trigger: Father needed harvesting help on the farm

Paul moved to the Central Coast with his father from the country after their farm went broke and the bank evicted them. He left school when his father needed help with harvesting, cotton and wheat in May of Year 10. Although he was good at maths, agriculture and English, he mucked around the last two years and his behaviour was a problem.

Before that Paul had done home schooling through Accelerated Christian Education. His career advice at school was negligible, although this hardly mattered because he believed that his future was on the farm. He did some work experience with a motor mechanic and had done part-time work on the neighbouring farm, driving tractors and headers (harvesters) and working with sheep and sowing sorghum. His aptitude for mechanics seems to have been a factor in a family friend offering an apprenticeship in a hydraulics company if he completed Year 10.

The bank's foreclosure on the family farm changed everything. He worked on the neighbour's farm for a while, even though this was a rather humiliating experience. He then travelled with his father working, including some time spent opal mining before moving to the Coast and getting a casual supermarket job. He realised that his skills from farm work and mechanics are not in demand in the area, while gaining vocational qualifications requires at least the School Certificate. After a disagreement with his father and being 'kicked out of home', he talked to a counsellor who suggested Year 10 at TAFE.

Paul has now enrolled in a full-time course, a Certificate in Adult Foundation Education (CAFE), which he says is a good course with lots of practical work and job involvement as a subject. He seems to be canny and knowledgeable about the labour market and has learned that employers want someone who is experienced and who can be trusted. He says 'in the first 30 seconds' of an interview, an employer will make judgements about dress, maturity and 'the way you talk'.

Paul feels there should be more advice about early leaving. He hopes to get into Year 10 (CGE) and next year will probably do his HSC. In two years he wants to be on a farm or doing his HSC.

10 Sally

Sex: female

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 5 mixed

Type: 3 circumstantial

At risk: yes

Theme: Struggling with problems, including homelessness, which have marred her attempts to study

Trigger: Troubled leaver with problems

Sally was interviewed at a youth refuge where she is living temporarily, supported by unemployment benefit with special allowance. She left school in June of Year 10. At the time she was living with grandparents who told her she could do courses, including the HSC at TAFE. After leaving she 'kept ringing' TAFE about a place. She then enrolled but found the course harder than school. There were rigorous progress tests and she found she couldn't keep up. She kept failing maths and other students' behaviour was distracting. She left in October, three months into the course after 'problems started'.

She regrets leaving school, because she had only a couple of months to go. She says that now she sees that discipline is important but, at the time, undisclosed family problems made it difficult for her to go on. (Although Sally did not give details about these problems, she said she had stayed in the refuge several times before she left school.)

School was quite strict in its discipline and she liked most subjects. There was a career subject, but she doesn't recall doing it and received little information to prepare her for leaving school, and found the main source of advice was her grandparents. After TAFE, the refuge put her in contact with the Help for Early Leavers Program (HELP) where she did two ten-week labour market courses, in childcare and retail skills. She had to leave the latter because of 'problems' again. Sally liked the childcare course because of its caring aspect, and her long-term goal is to get into nursing or clerical skills and 'get a certificate'. She would like to be working in a nursing home or hospital.

Sally has found it hard to find jobs because employers want skills and experience, although she has had a lot of help from the CES with résumé writing and job-seeking. She feels that schools need 'someone there' to lead people like her in the right direction regarding early leaving.

11 Melanie

Sex: female

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Very focussed on winning jobs, 'works hard and fast' and believes that being 'experienced and capable' is the key

Trigger: Full-time job in a food franchise

Melanie rates her success in finding work as 'ten out of ten' compared to other young people. She is very focussed on winning jobs and believes you have to have the 'confidence and courage to canvas' because 'there are jobs out there!'. She thinks she has been successful because she is 'willing', she 'works hard and learns fast' and has 'confidence with people'. She thinks that being 'experienced and capable' is more important than having the HSC or leaving early.

By the time she left school she had already worked in a fast-food shop for four nights per week for nearly a year (12 hours at about $8 per hour). Melanie says the people were 'kind and generous' and she continues to work with them although she has moved on to additional part-time work since. This includes a short time as a butcher's assistant, at the franchise food outlet and, currently, in a clothing shop (two and a half days per week) where she is learning selling skills and is 'challenged'. The experience as a butcher's assistant was unpleasant because of the man's swearing and other behaviour, and she left the food franchise because of 'bitchery' in the workplace.

Melanie left school to take a full-time job in the food franchise. She gained this job through an interview. At school, she did quite well in her subjects and thought of doing childcare or marine biology, but disliked the 'bitching and put-downs' of other students and being 'treated like children'. She wanted the independence, needed the money and didn't feel that she was doing well enough to justify staying on. Her parents combined income meant she was not eligible for Austudy. The principal, in giving her permission to leave, congratulated her on getting the job but encouraged her to 'come back any time' (although she only saw the principal because the career advisor opposed her decision to leave before the end of the year).

She is not keen on doing courses because she thinks they are too expensive and worries about living costs while studying. She has just moved into a flat which she shares with her girlfriend, and has a boyfriend who is 25. She feels she learns in practical ways, not from theory. Although she realises it will require study for vocational qualifications, in two years she'd like to be in childcare full time.

12 Jean

Sex:	female
Sample:	FT TAFE
VOCAM:	1 vocational
Type:	3 circumstantial
At risk:	no
Theme:	Found in the HSC path at TAFE an alternative to a negative school experience
Trigger:	Left after a difficult school year because of negative attitudes to her illness

Jean is currently finishing her Year 10 at a local TAFE college. Although she was doing well in most subjects, her last year at school was difficult, because of negative attitudes she experienced after returning to school after illness. There was 'bullying' and fighting, and she formed an impression of the school as a 'rough school' which 'tries to get most people out before Year 11'. At one stage, she was wagging school for two weeks at a time, would forge notes about absences, before school welfare rang and 'stunned' her parents.

Jean pressed her parents to leave, although the school counsellor urged her 'not to be a failure'. Since this time she has seen another counsellor who helped her a lot with her options on leaving. She stayed at home for three months after trying to enrol in TAFE because there was a high demand for places. Although she missed out on her first application, she felt lucky to gain a place in a second round of admissions. Soon after leaving school Jean got a full-time job as a receptionist in Sydney in an introduction agency but left after a week because it was a 'shonky' business.

At school she received little information about career options, although she recalls the career market at a leagues club, and they had job interview role-plays in English in Year 9. That year she also obtained a part-time job with a video store chain which provided training and promised advancement if she was interested. She thinks she was successful at job-seeking because of her confidence at interview and her maturity. She was fired after four months when she wanted to travel overseas with her family and the employer regarded this as a lack of commitment to the company.

She is currently doing well in the TAFE course, achieving high results and 'hopes to continue to HSC', but is again experiencing harassment from classmates, she says. She wants to enrol at university and become a physiotherapist, theatre nurse or a health professional of some kind. She regrets leaving and wishes that she could have had a 'proper, happy schooling'.

13 Harry

Sex:	male
Sample:	PT employed
VOCAM:	1 vocational
Type:	3 circumstantial
At risk:	yes
Theme:	Surviving a chaotic adolescence, he says with optimism 'you have to live, learn and love' and aims to open a counselling service
Trigger:	Car accident and chaotic life outside school

Harry is 18 and left school in September before his exams in Year 10, two years ago at the time of interview. He says he tried to organise a counselling group for two years, helping the kids with their problems (perhaps connected with their sexuality), but the pressure got too much and, after a car accident, he decided to 'disappear' from school.

Life outside school up to this point was chaotic. Harry has had had several changes of school and had been 'out of home' since he was 13 because of a 'schizophrenic' stepfather who abused him, living in various places and institutions and with various people. His memory of career advice is, however, clear—there were job preparation classes and career markets. The career advisor at his school was 'the best around' and spent hours of her own time and money getting kids work experience and jobs. She placed Harry into an independent living program where he learned cooking, budgetting and other skills for six months which helped him become 'less timid'.

Other counsellors have helped him with options, particularly the local youth services counsellor. He enrolled in a TAFE 'employment access' course, which was great because it was practical and showed him a range of work experiences and led to some part-time work with several local supermarkets doing 'cutting and wrapping'. However, work has got more difficult since he went to the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras where someone saw him on a float; there are 'rumours' and he has lost staff privileges. He has no contact with his parents, because his mother is 'ashamed of him'. He is currently also working in a responsible voluntary job. These activities mean he is too busy to do another course now. He says that not having the HSC is a disadvantage once you are over 18, you need to be trained to justify the senior wages. His long-term aim is to train as a counsellor and open a counselling service.

He regrets leaving school—the friendships lost, the loss of protection and income support and the subversive role he played at school. He wished he had studied and found a 'solid place' but life made that impossible. He has experienced problems with his abusive relationships, drugs and depression, but says optimistically, 'you have to live, learn and love'.

14 Jack

Sex: male

Sample: FT study

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 4 discouraged

At risk: yes

Theme: Artistic by nature, working towards a career in music while learning to live independently

Trigger: TAFE

Jack came to Australia from New Zealand to live in Central Queensland after completing Year 10 two years ago in New Zealand. He started Year 11 but left in July because he was 'not happy' with the education system and its differences from NZ.

Possibly because of his short time in the country, Jack received little career advice. However, after talking to a counsellor he decided to enrol in TAFE, especially after visiting the local TAFE college. The idea of going to a 'polytechnic' was very appealing. He organised enrolment by himself after finishing first semester. He did a creative employment course first, followed by a basic office skills course before moving to New South Wales and the Central Coast with his stepfather.

There he enrolled in the music industry certificate for a semester, where he felt he learned a range of skills and knowledge, and he is now looking forward to doing the 'technology major' when it 'comes up'. Jack is currently unemployed. He has done casual work for a family member, but found this work hard because he says he is not a 'physical type' but more artistic by nature. In the meantime he is receiving help through the job pathways employment and training (JPET) program since he is now living on his own. He rang up a youth service to find cheap accommodation after staying in a hotel for a while, and was referred to an independent living course, which 'you have to do' to get low rental accommodation. He feels this course is improving his ability to cope in this area.

Although he likes being independent he regrets leaving school and has experienced bouts of depression, as well as having had problems with alcohol and the police. Jack hopes in two years to be employed in the music industry.

15 Jessica

Sex: female

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 3 contextual

Type: 2 opportune

At risk: yes

Theme: School was a disaster after hospitalisation for anorexia; she felt she needed to have a different kind of life

Trigger: Illness

Jessica only recently moved to the Central Coast from a capital city where she attended high school. She was doing well but left in Year 11 because she had a 'disaster of a year' after returning to school from long periods of hospitalisation for anorexia in Years 8–10. She had been seriously ill and was virtually institutionalised up until her School Certificate year. Her friends were 'scared off' by the disorder and 'didn't want to deal with it'. Her parents agreed she could leave school if she found work, although teachers counselled her to stay. The career advisor 'wrote her off' and was basically 'very unhelpful'—she had very little help with work or vocational education and training (VET) options. Dealing with problems with her mother was another factor in leaving; she felt she needed a new life. She gained a full-time job with McDonalds in the city straight away, and worked for more than a year. Jessica recently gave it up because of the travel required and night shifts, although the work was also 'boring and repetitive'.

At school, she had held some part-time jobs mainly from answering newspaper advertisements, but illness forced her to give them up. She feels she has missed out on some jobs such as receptionist because she lacks skills and confidence, but work has left her no time for courses. While the job pathways employment and training program has helped her gain a job in a sandwich shop, she would like 'a stable job with a future and her own place and a vehicle'. She is thinking of a TAFE computing course to increase her vocational options, although her hopes at school were to do law. Jessica is still adjusting to the Coast, is troubled by her friends' problems and their 'weird parents' and the incidence of family breakdown.

16 Rod

Sex: male

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Always expected to go into the family business, left school to be apprenticed to his brother

Trigger: Had a job

Rod left school at the end of Year 10 because he had a job to go to in the family automotive business where he is now apprenticed to his older brother. His parents were happy with his decision, since they expected this would happen some time. Most of his friends in the year had now left. The school was fairly strict, since he says it took kids expelled from other places. In his subjects he suspects he 'did well enough'.

He recalls fortnightly career periods and activities like résumé writing. Work experience in Year 10 was arranged for those intending to leave and he had tried an interior design shop for something different from automotive work. In fact, he had spent many hours getting work experience in the family business during holidays and on weekends. He recalls the career market at the leagues club where some employees had said that 'work experience can turn into an apprenticeship' and he saw it happen for one boy.

The previous year he had held a part-time job in a spring factory in Gosford, working after school on Saturdays, helping with the furnace, building springs and welding. He 'learned a lot' before the company closed down. He is now enjoying his course at Wyong TAFE and says the field is challenging and changing rapidly with electronics, an area which it is essential for automotive repairers to know. Each year he goes to a national industry conference on the Gold Coast to learn about the latest technology and do specialist training.

With his knowledge of the family business, he understands the expectations employers have of young people. They will employ someone who wants to learn, someone with 'a good attitude' who is good with the work, who will stay back and learn after hours. Employers want to see 'how you go in the workshop, how quick you are, whether you know the best way to do something, your skill in diagnosing faults'. He is, perhaps, conscious of his own good luck in walking into a family business. He also thinks that there need to be better ways for young people to find jobs, and that more information should be given on how to do this.

17 Reg

Sex: male

Sample: PT employed

VOCAM: 5 mixed

Type: 2 opportune

At risk: no

Theme: School was unsafe, there were fights and he made bad friends, and felt he had to get out to break the cycle

Trigger: Found a job part time

Reg decided to leave school three quarters of the way through Year 10 when he was 16 years old because he felt he had to 'break the cycle' and escape from the school environment. He mentioned two contributing factors. Although the school had a severe discipline code where 'punishment did not fit the crime', it was not a safe place to be. Fights often broke out and 'there was not enough protection' for students. Then Reg found himself caught up with friends who smoked dope and although he could see this was leading him nowhere, peer pressures made it hard not to fit in with the group. So when he found a job, he requested an exemption to leave. No-one tried to discourage him from leaving school other than his parents who, although initially unhappy with his decision, eventually agreed with him. He left with a School Certificate but without a reference.

Whilst at school, his most positive learning experience about the world of work was the work experience his career advisor organised for him with a wildlife park. He learned a lot about caring for animals and enjoyed working outdoors and having responsibility. As a result he started to work voluntarily for the park. Besides work experience he does not recall any other experiences that prepared him for the labour force. Although he did get some career advice from his English teacher and the school career advisor, this was on an ad-hoc basis and centred mainly on TAFE, the group training organisation and apprenticeships. Most of the information was in written form. The role of the CES and other government agencies was not mentioned and, in retrospect, he feels this information would have been useful.

Since leaving school, he has only had part-time and casual jobs. He currently works three days a week at a supermarket as a floor person and is on call as a kitchen hand for two other employers. He would like to do a training course but needs more information before he can make a decision. To date he has applied for five jobs and has not used the CES. He sees himself as being 'pretty good' at finding jobs in comparison to his friends who lack initiative and experience. He thinks employers are interested in personal qualities, experience and skills in that order and do not place much emphasis on length of schooling. However, he does regret not having finished Year 12 and hopes this will not hinder him in securing a job in a trade.

It seems his concerns about his friends' drug-taking are well-founded. Since school, three have died from overdoses and this has had a sobering effect on him. His advice to other school leavers is not to leave school unless there is 'a decent job to go to', choose friends carefully and get qualifications.

18 Rita

Sex: female

Sample: FT study

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 3 circumstantial

At risk: no

Theme: She was unhappy and isolated at her new school and poor attendance resulted in the school saying she should leave

Trigger: Isolated in the new school, started to truant

Rita is 17 years old and gives the impression of someone in need of nurturing or counselling. She lives with her father, a business manager in a fairly time-consuming job and there does not appear to be much contact with her mother who lives interstate or her only sister who does not live at home.

Her final years at school were unhappy. In Year 9, her father became concerned about the influence of friends and made her move school. This did not help and apparently made matters worse. She lost her friends and felt isolated in the new school and found it lacking in discipline. The teachers were less helpful than those at her first school and she ended up leaving in the middle of Year 10 without obtaining a School Certificate or a reference. Although she described herself as an average student who never got into trouble, poor attendance resulted in the school advising her to leave, with TAFE being suggested as a possible alternative. In discussion with her father, she decided to adopt this course of action.

Rita says she received little assistance or counselling at school other than being given a phone number for TAFE, and feels some 'real support' would have helped her make the transition. She has not been employed since leaving and puts this down to a lack of personal contacts in the working world and a terrible résumé which even a visit to the CES was not able to rectify.

She is currently in a one-year full-time Certificate in General Education (CGE) Course which she sees as an alternative to Year 10. She enjoys being treated as an adult at TAFE and, although she misses her school friends, her aim is to continue her study at TAFE until she completes Year 12.

19 Jason

Sex: male

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 2 opportune

At risk: yes

Theme: Would rather work and learn on the job and does not see a connection between formal training and employment

Trigger: Found a job straight away

Jason is an only child in a family where both parents have full-time jobs. He left school in the middle of Year 10 in 1996 when he was 16 years of age, because he was getting nothing out of it. He did not like the teachers' attitude of 'pulling rank' and the lack of freedom in even minor things, like not being allowed to go to the toilet during class time.

His parents were prepared to accept his leaving school, provided he got himself a job. In fact, he found part-time work immediately as a sales assistant through his own effort by approaching the store and putting his name on a list. He enjoyed the work and learned a few skills and stayed in the job for six months at which point he was fired for having too many days off due to ill health. He did not elaborate on the causes of his ill health and did not mention it as a problem in finding work.

When Jason decided to leave school, no-one tried to convince him otherwise. More of his friends stayed on at school. He left without a School Certificate or a reference. He seems to have got most of his advice about job-seeking skills from the weekly class run by the career advisor and mentioned the job guide as being a useful source of information. He does not recall any guest speakers coming to talk about the world of work or further study, except someone from TAFE.

Since leaving school Jason has used the CES, has a case manager and is pleased with the assistance he has received, including putting together a résumé. Despite help from the CES and spending an average of one day a week job hunting, he is currently unemployed and on the Youth Training Allowance. He has been advised to enrol in the New Skills program, but has not enrolled in it or in any other training courses. He would rather work and learn on the job and does not see a connection between formal training and employment. He believes that employers value personal qualities and experience rather than formal qualifications and remains optimistic about his chances of getting a job, although he is not focussed in any way about the sort of job he should pursue.

Life has been quite difficult for him since he has left school. He has experienced problems with income support, housing and personal relationships. Jason has attempted to solve some of his problems by sharing a flat with a mate and sees this as preferable to living at home, a more adult life. In two years time he sees himself as being married with kids and a full-time job. His advice to school leavers is 'finish your Year 10 and get work experience'.

20 Wes

Sex:	male
Sample:	unemployed
VOCAM:	1 vocational
Type:	1 positive
At risk:	yes
Theme:	Wanted to do more practical things, to be an apprentice chef; started a food course with this in view
Trigger:	Enrolled in a full-time one-year TAFE Grade 3 Food Studies Course

Wes described school as 'all right'. His academic performance was average and his behaviour acceptable. He says he was good at subjects such as agriculture, food technology and science but poor at maths. However, by the time he came to the end of Year 10 at 15 years of age, he felt that school was not where he wanted to be. He wanted to do more practical things, rather than 'writing' and he was tired of 'putting up with the way kids act'. What he really wanted was to be an apprentice chef, but he was unable to secure an apprenticeship and left school anyway with many of his friends.

His main job-seeking skills were gained in a weekly class run by the school career advisor who provided him with notes and handouts on TAFE, apprenticeships, traineeships, the CES and labour market programs and ran workshops in job-seeking skills. He recalls that guest speakers were invited to the school, including the police and a career theatre group. He did not participate in work experience, nor did he have a part-time job. He left school with his School Certificate but without a reference, although the deputy principal agreed to be a referee for him if ever he required one. He thinks what would have been most helpful to him and to others like him would have been to have someone 'like a case manager, who kept on to you till you got a job'. He feels school could have been improved if kids were invited to have a say about teaching styles employed in the classroom and if facilities like computers were improved.

His parents are both in full-time work and initially were not happy with Wes leaving school but were more accepting when he enrolled in a full-time one-year TAFE Grade 3 Food Studies Course. He enrolled in this course in order to learn more about the food industry and is pleased at his practical skills and how much he knows about the industry. He participated in valuable work experience, something he missed out on whilst at school. Despite the positive experiences gained from the course, Wes left after six months because he doubted he would pass.

He has so far applied for two apprenticeships and four jobs but has only succeeded in gaining casual work such as cleaning, mowing lawns and labouring. He recently gained a casual job as a kitchen hand through a newspaper advertisement. He has used the CES and has a case manager, but no suitable full-time jobs or courses have come up. He spends 15 minutes a week looking for jobs in the paper and remains hopeful about his future. He rates his success in finding work as good and does not identify any obvious problem areas. He sees laziness as a cause for kids being unemployed and thinks that unemployment benefits, which he does not receive, should be cut. He feels employers are primarily looking for employees with good personal qualities and skills rather than qualifications.

21 Len

Sex:	male
Sample:	unemployed
VOCAM:	1 vocational
Type:	1 positive
At risk:	no
Theme:	Determined to pursue a career in animal care and is travelling to Sydney to study in this field
Trigger:	None—negative aspects of school outweigh any advantages

Len lives at home with his mother and stepfather and both parents are in full-time work. School did not work for him. Although he was good at science and maths, he did not like the repetitious way in which the latter was taught. In his view 'schools always want to think for you and won't let you think for yourself'. Len felt that at his first school there was not enough freedom and kids were bullied into doing things by their superiors rather than through counselling. He appears to have been in the company of 'bad' kids, although he claims he did not get into as much trouble as they did. This position changed for the better when he changed schools in Year 10, but he remained unconvinced about the value of school for him. The death of his father during that year also appears to have affected his school work to some extent.

Len decided to leave school at the end of the year and took with him his School Certificate. He was 15 years old. His mother agreed to him leaving school on the condition that he did other study and it was his hope to do a course organised by the career advisor in animal nursing at TAFE. None of the teachers suggested he stay on, but his friends tried to convince him to stay and most of them did.

Most of his job-seeking skills appear to have been gained in the weekly class held by the school career advisor, using the Job Guide as a text. He completed a two-week work experience placement organised by the advisor with a veterinarian during which he learned many new skills. This led to him working as a volunteer at the clinic once a week all this year and he is hoping that this may lead to an apprenticeship or paid work. He is also enrolled as a part-time student at a TAFE college in Sydney in a one-year animal care course, which he sees as improving his chance of getting work. Although he has to travel home by train late at night, he will not let this prevent him from finishing his course. In his mind the travel issue is a bigger problem than his disability. He claims that he has never let the disability stop him from doing what he wanted to do.

In addition to the animal care course and on the advice of his mother, Len took on two other courses at TAFE. These were a 16-week Computer First Skills Course which he completed with a certificate and a ten-week Communications Course which he did not complete because there was 'a lot of work and too many notes to read'.

Len is focussed upon a career in animal care and has therefore only applied for the two jobs that have come up in this field. Most of his friends are in work, but only because they are happy to take anything they can get. He prefers to remain on the disability pension whilst using the services of the Practical Employment Services set up mainly to assist disabled people (the CES has not been 'very useful'). His parents remain helpful and hopeful and he feels confident that he will secure work in his chosen field.

22 Dylan

Sex: male

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 3 contextual

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Determined to pursue a career in animal care and is travelling to Sydney to study in this field

Trigger: None—negative aspects of school outweigh any advantages

Dylan is the kind of person whose personality bursts into the room before he does. With his dreadlocks and good looks he makes a big statement. He has always been interested in art, photography and music. Leaving school at 16, halfway through Year 10, he wanted to get a job as a carpenter and continue his interest in music through study. With very little career advice at school, he left early in the year yet managed to get his School Certificate as well as a reasonable school reference.

His mother and her partner were accepting of his decision to leave. Most of his peers were staying on at the time and his friends had no attitude to his decision. Dylan doesn't recall any contact with the career advisor and reported no assistance or guidance about TAFE and other options.

With the spirit of a budding entrepreneur and whilst still at school, he started quite a successful odd jobs and lawn-mowing business with a friend. He continued this after he left school and thought they could have expanded the business but they lacked a driver's licence. While at school, he had some success organising other casual jobs and after leaving was able to build on this experience to get work. Through family contacts, much of his work has been in the building and fishing industries.

Dylan is a dedicated follower of youth culture and is focussed on his life as a musician in a band. To improve his musicianship, he is enrolled in a music course at TAFE and continues with casual work whilst on unemployment benefits. He feels confident he will secure a carpentry apprenticeship in the future.

23 Geoff

Sex: male

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Has single-mindedly pursued his goal to be a motor mechanic, organising training and work experience before leaving

Trigger: Resolve to leave school and get an apprenticeship

Geoff has a passion to be a motor mechanic and has single-mindedly pursued this goal. His initiative and ability to take responsibility in securing his future is evident in many of the actions he took whilst at school. Firstly, he saw an advertisement in the newspaper for a mechanics course at a youth centre. He talked his way into getting a place on the course even though it was primarily designed for students who had already left school. In addition to going to school four days a week, he attended the mechanics course for one day a week for a term, completed it and obtained a certificate.

During Year 10 he completed his work experience at a car company and later that year took up an opportunity presented by the school to attend an Introduction to Mechanics Course at TAFE for one day a week. He also had a part-time job at McDonalds.

All these experiences enhanced Geoff's knowledge in the field and strengthened his resolve to leave school and get an apprenticeship. He left at the age of 15 at the end of Year 10 after obtaining his School Certificate. No-one at school tried to discourage him from leaving; most of his friends were leaving and his mother would have preferred him to stay on, but she agreed with his decision because he was going straight into a job.

He thought school was 'pretty good', passed all his subjects and rarely got into trouble. He appears to have received some job career guidance at school, mainly about TAFE and apprenticeships. However, he never got to write a résumé and quickly worked out that this was a critical tool in job hunting, so he later paid a private company to write one for him in order to present himself more professionally. He never needed to put this to the test as he secured a full-time job as a mechanic soon after leaving school. This was obtained, not through the services of an agency, but on a friend's recommendation. Geoff feels his determination and all the experiences and courses he did whilst at school contributed to his success.

24 Leslie

Sex: male

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Focussed on a career in the hospitality industry as a chef and is working hard to get an apprenticeship

Trigger: Desire to pursue work as a chef

Leslie is focussed on a career in the hospitality industry as a chef. This is evident in all the work and training he has had since leaving school. He has some casual work in a take-away food outlet, lives with his younger brother and his mother who has a part-time job.

He sees himself as an average student who rarely got into trouble, was good at maths but not English where he tried hard and was even tutored at home without much success. He wonders if his attention deficit disorder contributed to this situation. He has no real complaints about school and observes that it could have been made 'more exciting' and students could have been given awards to increase their motivation.

School was not offering him the practical experiences he needed so he left towards the end of Year 10, when he was 16 years of age. Neither his mother nor the school opposed his intention to leave. He was given a School Certificate but no reference. He recalls a regular fortnightly class with a career advisor from whom he obtained information on TAFE, apprenticeships, traineeships and the CES. He did not do work experience which may have happened after he left. However, he can recall having discussions on employers' needs and expectations, listening to guest speakers from the local council talk about jobs, learning how to prepare a résumé and present at a job interview. Throughout school he had always had part-time jobs such as a paper round and labouring.

Leslie felt reasonably well prepared when he left school and on his first day of 'freedom' he went straight to the CES, accessed their computerised job listing and secured himself a permanent part-time job at a restaurant as a kitchen hand. This led to further part-time work with another part of the same business. This was a positive experience. He learned to cook and worked directly with the chef. The job lasted 11 months and he was hopeful of getting an apprenticeship, but he had a falling out with the owner and ceased working in the restaurant, although he has continued to work casually in the take-away business.

Leslie spends two hours a week looking for a job and finds the CES a 'good, useful' service; however, he says looking for a job is a 'lot harder than staying at school'. He has applied for about ten jobs, responding to advertisements, filling in application forms and going to interviews. He enrolled in a CES New Start program and found it kept him motivated but he did not get a job out of it. He thinks employers are looking for skills and experience, particularly in the hospitality area. His advice to other school leavers is to ensure they do some work experience in Year 10 or even in Year 9 and to enrol in a TAFE course before they leave school. Despite the downturn in his fortunes, he feels optimistic about his future and hopes to secure an apprenticeship as a chef.

25 Heidi

Sex: female

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 4 discouraged

At risk: yes

Theme: Although not managing to hold jobs, remains optimistic about her work prospects, feels she has the drive, physical appearance and personality

Trigger: Teacher's suggestion to have a break

Heidi's parents were 'not too happy' when she decided to leave school in 1996. At the time one of her teachers suggested she leave school for a year for a break and then return, although it seems most of her friends were staying on and encouraged her to do the same.

Although she was good at maths and had an interest in media studies, overall Heidi 'hated everything' about school 'except socialising'. She felt the teachers had no control and let the students 'run amok' and she tended to get into more trouble than her peers. She decided to leave school early in Year 10 when she was 15 years old and received some counselling prior to leaving school from both the counsellor and the career advisor on options like TAFE, apprenticeships and traineeships, although no specific courses were mentioned. She was also told about employers' expectations, received assistance in putting a résumé together and was schooled in interview behaviour.

Upon leaving, without having had any work experience or a part-time job while in school, Heidi relied upon her family for career advice. During the year she has been quite successful in gaining a number of jobs. The first was part time for nine months as a cashier, a job which she liked initially because of its focus on customer service but came to dislike after facing rude customers. She eventually left when offered a full-time position elsewhere. The second job was full time and was obtained through a relative who ran a hairdressing salon. She loved the job and appreciated the on-the-job training, but left after three months because she didn't get along with her relative whom she felt treated her differently from the other staff. This involved putting her down in front of other staff and demanding higher standards from her than from the other workers.

Heidi's last job was in food retail. She found this through the CES and was successful at interview. The job involved counter service and food preparation. A lot of on-the-job training was involved like food preparation and she was also sent to a retail skills training course. In the end she was signed up for a traineeship. Unfortunately, not long after this and after having been in the job for three months she was sacked, she says, 'because the tills were going short'.

Despite this disappointing record in holding jobs, Heidi rates herself highly in terms of her success in finding work and puts it down to 'having the drive, the physical appearance and the personality'. She thinks employers value personal qualities and experience and she remains optimistic about her prospects despite her realisation that the lack of a School Certificate and résumé can be a disadvantage. Her mother, although frustrated by her current situation, tries to be supportive by waking her in the morning and getting her off to the CES.

26 Donna

Sex: female

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 3 circumstantial

At risk: yes

Theme: Left because she was bullied at school, but will return in order to get into childcare

Trigger: The fact that she was being bullied at school

Donna was 16 when she decided to leave school after second term in 1996. Her mother supported her decision and, although her father didn't agree, he 'went along with the idea'. She faced some pressure to stay from her friends who told her she was 'stupid and wasting her life'. Her year advisor also encouraged her to stay on. In the end, Donna's low self-esteem and the fact that she was being bullied at school won the day and she left her school life behind.

Donna received no formal support on exit from the school. Without a school reference or meaningful career guidance, she went to face the world of work. Ironically, Donna now says that she would have stayed on at school if she had known that completing Year 10 was needed to get into childcare, her real career aspiration.

Reflecting on her time at school, Donna felt it would have been better if the teachers had offered more help and were not so strict. She described her behaviour in school as 'good' and her academic performance as slightly below average. Her main memory of career advice is a period a week filling in forms and organising résumés, supplemented by advice on where to find a job and how to approach an interview.

After leaving, for a time she stayed at home but found a three-day-a-week job through a family friend as a sales assistant in a warehouse. She found her duties dealing with stock and sales hard and this was made more difficult by commuting to work in Sydney. Three months later she gave up the job due to the travelling and her desire to go back to school to qualify for entry to childcare. Donna is now looking for work and reads the local paper on a weekly basis and makes random visits to the CES. She is hopeful of getting work and thinks that employers rate personal qualities and experience higher than paper qualifications, although if she had her time again she would not have left school without having first lined up a job.

27 June

Sex: female

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Determined to gain employment and skills after leaving school, her life is a patchwork of different jobs and vocational courses

Trigger: None

June's mother was upset at the prospect of her 17 year old leaving school and was adamant that June find a job before leaving. Her father appeared disappointed but didn't say much. Her friends were ambivalent saying it was 'her life' and the teachers showed no response to her decision. Advice from the career advisor centred on TAFE, CES and SkillShare options. June's real aspiration was to be a motor mechanic and the advisor also discussed the defence forces as a way of achieving this goal.

In school she felt picked on by her peers and nagged at by her teachers about her performance, but she appreciated the counsellor's capacity to listen and felt someone to talk to on a more regular basis when required would have helped her.

The career advisor was able to organise some work experience for her alongside motor mechanics at a local repair shop. June enjoyed the four days experience and felt she learned a few skills. Unfortunately, she was told by one of the mechanics that she 'would not be much of a mechanic'. After this experience she decided being a motor mechanic was not for her. She had no idea that Year 10 was required for an apprenticeship and knew nothing of traineeship possibilities.

June stands out because of her determination to gain employment and skills after leaving school. Her time since leaving is a patchwork of different jobs and vocational courses through TAFE, SkillShare and the Get Started program. On leaving school, she went straight into work as a casual kitchen hand, a job she got through the CES. She didn't like the work and left after a week. Three months later through the Get Started program she got her second job as a casual checkout operator, a job she held for about six months. She found the job demanding and the supervisors 'bitchy' and left in December 1995, deciding to return to school.

She re-entered school but left after five weeks when she found she was not committed to the work. She enrolled in a six-month Year 9 refresher course at TAFE during which time she improved her maths, English, computing and job skills. She then resumed working as a casual on supermarket checkouts. She saw most of the year out in that job before leaving after it was implied that she might have been stealing from the till. June then completed a first-aid course at TAFE, a computer applications course at SkillShare and was a member of the Job Club.

Then, entirely through her own initiative, she followed up on a job she saw advertised through the CES and is now in a full-time position including a traineeship in office skills. She loves the work even though it involves travel to Sydney on a daily basis.

28 Belle

Sex: female

Sample: FT study

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 4 discouraged

At risk: no

Theme: Decided to stick with her original choice in the arts area and is enrolled at full-time TAFE

Trigger: Is dyslexic, did not want to remain at school

Belle appears confident and articulate. Her parents and older brother are in full-time work in arts-oriented careers and Belle, too, wishes to pursue a career in a similar field. She says she did not do well at school because she is dyslexic and provides this as one of her reasons for not wanting to remain at school. Other reasons include having to learn subjects (excluding English and art) which were 'meaningless' and being in a school where discipline 'was not particularly good' and 'basically you did what you wanted'.

Belle was 16 years old and three quarters of the way through Year 10 when she left school. Her parents didn't mind as her brother had also left school early and had 'not done too badly'. Most of her friends also left that year and there was a mixed response from her teachers as to whether she should stay or leave. Two teachers provided her with positive references, although she is not sure that these have been useful in getting her a job or accommodation.

Preparation for the workplace included attending a career class at school. However, apart from putting together a portfolio of her work and references, she has no recollection of getting advice on any employment-related services other than TAFE and she did not participate in work experience. The latter may have resulted because she left before the end of the year. In retrospect, she thinks she would have benefitted from individual help and counselling and the provision of information on housing options.

Soon after leaving school she secured a full-time job through the CES as a sales assistant. Whilst in the job she was informally trained in using the cash register and dealing with customers. However, she did not enjoy the work, particularly the pressure to make sales, and after three months she left. She decided to stick with her original choice of doing something in the arts area and is currently enrolled in a full-time TAFE Fine Arts Certificate course. Despite the fact that she has to travel to northern Sydney, she is 'glad to be at TAFE'. She is interested in the content of the course, the teachers are helpful and encouraging and the atmosphere is totally different to school and the contact with older people has helped her 'grow up a lot'.

Belle has had her share of problems including lack of income, inadequate accommodation and she describes herself as 'living anywhere and everywhere'. She has also had some personal problems. Belle has had support and assistance from her parents and a program called Youth Access which she feels should be constantly open to others like her.

29 Buster

Sex: male

Sample: work & study

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 2 opportune

At risk: no

Theme: Mother was an employer who supported his plan to look for work, helped find him an apprenticeship

Trigger: Parent supported decision to look for work

Buster's teachers did not try to dissuade him from leaving school. He admits he 'was a bit of a behaviour problem' and 'talked too much'. He thinks the school could have helped more by having better class control and more assistance with school work before and after school.

His mother supported Buster's decision to leave school and find work. With many of his peers leaving, he had all the peer support he needed. He left with his School Certificate after having turned 16. Buster received broad career advice through a weekly class as a part of his normal studies but no specific guidance on how to find a job once he had decided to go. Fortunately, he had always had part-time jobs whilst at school and as his mother owned her own business he had some idea of what employers were looking for. Some career activities he found useful were visits from TAFE and other private providers to the school and a career day run at a local club with stalls set up by employers and training providers.

With good skills in technical drawing and woodwork, Buster tried a week's work experience in carpentry. He enjoyed the experience but discovered he didn't want to be a carpenter. Lawn mowing was his immediate option when he left school, but this was severely curtailed when he lost his driver's licence. Since then he has been fortunate in securing a plumbing apprenticeship through a family contact. He attends TAFE as part of this and when things slowed down at work in July this year he converted his interest in computers into a part-time job (self-employed), selling PCs and components. He now continues with these three options.

30 Case

Sex: male

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 5 alienated

At risk: yes

Theme: Dropped out after wagging a lot, but now hopes to do his Year 10 and find an apprenticeship

Trigger: Truancy

Case felt it was time to leave after 'wagging school a lot'. He left school midway through 1995 at the age of 15. He was ill prepared to leave and his subsequent experiences have borne this out. Other than his brother, most of his friends are out of work and he is to some extent caught up in a 'dole culture' and lacks experience, role models and contacts.

Case left school without a School Certificate or a reference. Both his parents are unemployed and his mother with whom he lives was not pleased with his decision but 'went along with it'. Only a few other people had made the decision to leave school around the time that he decided to leave. His friends and teachers were ambivalent.

Case describes his own behaviour as between 'average to bad'. He found his maths teacher 'spiteful' and concluded that the school was 'run to enhance the principal's image' with a focus on the high achievers. He feels that the school could have been better if the teachers had been more helpful and there had been more discipline.

He received some basic career advice before he left school with an emphasis on TAFE and apprenticeship options and put together a résumé. He completed a week of work experience at a restaurant which confirmed for him his desire to work as a chef like his stepbrother, who is an apprentice chef and has had some influence on his career thinking. He did not seem to realise that as an apprentice he would be required to do further study.

Immediately after leaving school Case spent his time 'sleeping in or going to the CES' which he learned about from friends who were already registered as unemployed. However, when he attempted to register he discovered he was not eligible for benefits. The following year he re-enrolled at school in order to get his School Certificate, but stayed for only half the year. By this stage he was eligible for unemployment benefits and he began looking for work.

He has applied for about 50 jobs, mostly had casual and part-time work in hospitality and a short stint as a general hand in the tiling trade. He says in all cases the jobs came to an end through work 'drying up' or changes in key people to whom Case reported. His experience with the CES has been mixed. He has had two case managers who have steered him more towards training courses than jobs. As a result he has completed a basic hospitality course. He thinks employers 'are asking for more experience than required' which he thinks is hard to obtain if you are a young school leaver with few contacts.

However, he remains optimistic about his goal to get the School Certificate and then an apprenticeship.

31 Shane

Sex: male

Sample: FT study

VOCAM: 5 mixed

Type: 4 discouraged

At risk: yes

Theme: Greatly appreciates the amount of support he receives from TAFE through his CAFE program, reorienting himself to study

Trigger: Poor work in subjects—academic failure

When Shane told his mother of his decision to leave school, she was not pleased, but he felt the pressure of poor performance in his subjects and 'pulled the plug'. His teachers 'tried to help' when he finally made the decision to leave his school. The counsellor supplied him with a copy of the job guide and the school wrote him a reference, making it as positive as they could.

Shane changed schools six times while in high school. He described his behaviour in school as average and 'leaning toward a bit bad' but he felt the school could have helped more by giving more attention to students and worrying less about little things such as the wrong coloured socks. The last school he was at had him enrolled in a 'Time Out' program designed for disadvantaged students and those with behavioural problems. Here he found out about programs like Helping Early Leavers run by SkillShare which he accessed after leaving school.

Shane's career advice at school centred on a weekly class where he learned of TAFE, apprenticeship and labour market program options, but learned little about which firms employ school leavers and what employers look for when they employ school leavers. He also did not get a chance to do work experience or prepare a résumé.

Since leaving school Shane has used the CES. They sent him to SkillShare, and he enrolled in a part-time Introduction to Trades Course run through the Helping Early Leavers Program. This lasted three months and he says he gained valuable information on how to apply for jobs, present at interviews and prepare résumés. Since then he has applied for up to 20 jobs, mainly in supermarkets. He has responded to advertisements and cold canvassed but, to date, his only success has been a job obtained through his mother—a week of selling products door to door, which he didn't enjoy at all. The other is a casual job in stone masonry he has had since he was at school.

Shane now finds himself enrolled for a second time in a full-time CAFE course at Gosford TAFE. His plan is to attempt Year 9 studies in readiness for the School Certificate, which he may do either at TAFE or by going back to school. At this stage he is not sure which option he will pursue. What he is sure about and greatly appreciates is the amount of support he receives through his TAFE program.

32 Ken

Sex: male

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: After impressing his supervisors in casual work, was offered a trainee manager position on leaving school after Year 10

Trigger: Work experience counts

Ken's break from school could be viewed as a dream run. For a whole year prior to leaving school he had worked as a casual at a supermarket, doing a range of tasks—stacking shelves, building displays and housekeeping. He impressed his supervisors and they offered him a position as a trainee manager when he completed Year 10. When this happened, Ken felt the time had come to make a change and his parents were supportive of his decision. His friends, however, were shocked as most of them were staying on at school and he had a mixed reaction from his teachers.

Ken saw himself as an average student at school. He felt his school was hard on the kids and on leaving enjoyed 'not having to put up with other students or have teachers annoy you'. Nevertheless, he seems to have been given adequate preparation for the world of work. This included weekly classes with the career advisor as well as personal interviews. He was given a copy of the job guide and was taken to the career market held at the local league's club. He showed an awareness of the full range of support options available to him from TAFE, through to labour market programs, and defence forces programs. Interestingly, work experience was not offered to him and he left with a School Certificate but without a reference. As Ken has never had to put any of his job-seeking skills to the test, he was unable to comment on their efficacy. Nor could he comment on employer attitudes or the problems of finding and keeping work.

Since commencing his traineeship at the supermarket, Ken has enrolled in two training courses. The first was a part-time course in retail calculations and was something he chose to do in his own time and at his own expense. The other is a requirement of his traineeship. His success in the labour market could be due to his willingness to show initiative as demonstrated in his choice to enrol in the first training course.

33 Peter

Sex: male

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Really wanted to do outdoor work of some kind, did work experience and found a full-time job through his football coach

Trigger: Work experience

Both of Peter's working parents placed a condition on his desire to leave school—he must have a job lined up first. When his football coach who is also a landscape gardener offered him a full-time job, Peter seized the opportunity because it fitted in well with his personal goals. Peter's career aspiration was always to get into landscaping. He has spent school holidays working on a hydroponic farm and while at school completed a week's work experience with a landscaper. This single-mindedness paid off and is what influenced his coach to make the job offer.

Sport was the best thing about school for Peter and the worst aspect of school was 'not earning any money' and 'being stuck indoors'. He felt the school could have been better if the teachers had shown 'mutual respect'.

Peter describes a fairly comprehensive range of options presented through weekly career classes in both Year 9 and Year 10. At the school, students had a choice of either organising their own work experience or letting the school do it for them. Peter did a week's experience in bricklaying and another in landscaping. He found this invaluable as it gave him a really good feel for what it would be like to go to work every day. He sees work experience as a good way of trying out jobs and recommends it to all potential early school leavers.

Peter left school during the mid-year holidays in Year 11 when he was 17. He had his School Certificate and he had met his parent's pre-condition. It was his mother who returned to the school to announce his departure to find that by this stage half of Peter's peers had left school. Peter didn't receive a school reference and wasn't sure whether they issued these anyway. He thinks employers are less interested in references than they are in personal qualities demonstrated by young people. 'I really wanted to work', he says, and this is the reason he rates his success in finding work as 'pretty good'. Peter thinks that lots of people 'don't really want to work' and when they apply for jobs he feels this attitude shows.

He has not been overly keen about doing any training, but with the possibility of getting an apprenticeship at work he is thinking about going to TAFE. He enjoys the work and company of the people he works with and hopes to be there for a long while.

34 Gary

Sex: male

Sample: work & study

VOCAM: 5 mixed

Type: 2 opportune

At risk: no

Theme: Matured quite a bit since leaving school and has enrolled in Year 10 through the Open Training and Education Network (OTEN)

Trigger Dispute and physical exchange with a teacher

A dispute at school with a teacher and a 'physical exchange' triggered Gary's departure from school. He was suspended and felt because of the 'bad vibes' it was best he did not attempt to return. With support from his mother he set out on the quest for an alternative, although at 15 years of age his aspiration to be a chef seemed a long way off.

Gary's recollections of school are not all bad. He liked some of his teachers—the ones like his English teacher 'who listened'. He says he passed all his subjects, with his best results in advanced maths. However, he feels school could have been better if 'teachers respected kids more'. Unfortunately, for the short time he was in Year 10 the career teacher was sick and he received nothing in the way of preparation for work.

With no formally organised work experience while at school, Gary found his own part-time work for the weekends and holidays in quite a novel way. He won a competition at a local amusement park and, as a result, was offered a job by the manager. He did this while he was at school and after he left.

His year advisor was the primary source of advice and assistance in getting into TAFE, once it was clear he was leaving. Upon leaving school, Gary continued his job at the amusement park on a casual basis, and now supplements this with casual work in the kitchen or counter at McDonalds. He says he has matured quite a bit since leaving school and is well aware of the benefits of having a School Certificate. He has, therefore, enrolled in a full-time Certificate of General Education course at TAFE which he is doing by correspondence through OTEN. He sees this as the 'key' to getting a job, even though he feels it is experience that employers are after.

35 Janine

Sex:	female
Sample:	unemployed
VOCAM:	3 contextual
Type:	3 circumstantial
At risk:	yes
Theme:	She just wants to be on her own with the baby, but feels caught in her current relationship
Trigger:	Became pregnant in Year 9 aged 14

Janine came from overseas when she was six years old. Both her parents are currently unemployed. Janine is now 16 and devoted to a six-month-old daughter from her second pregnancy. Her first at age 14 resulted in a miscarriage which she says philosophically was for the best—'I was too young, I'm too young now'. Janine says she would leave having children until older (about 20). All her friends are on their own with babies too but she doesn't see them very much because she lives with her boyfriend. However, she is not happy in her relationship with her boyfriend who 'hurts her in every way' both physically and emotionally and 'has been in gaol for it', although she says he is good with the baby. They are currently going to counselling but she just wants to be on her own with the baby.

Having left school in Year 9 at 14 when pregnant the first time, she has neither the School Certificate nor a reference from school. Janine's ambition is to have an office job. After leaving school she went to TAFE to do her School Certificate but dropped out due to depression resulting from a split with her boyfriend. Although the boyfriend returned, she did not resume her studies. It was at this point that she miscarried but soon after became pregnant again. Janine says that she loved school, liked being with her friends but she didn't like being told what to do. She did well at history, maths and science but disliked PE and English due to a personality clash with the teacher.

When she left, no advice was given about finding job or training opportunities, although she would have liked to have worked during her pregnancy. At school Janine had no work experience or career advice as this occurs from Year 10. She has never worked either part time or full time, but has applied for about five part-time jobs. She now feels 'caught' and has given up looking for work because she is always rejected. There are too many applying for jobs and not enough jobs available. She doesn't have the right skills, qualifications, experience or training and she thinks that employers want someone who looks better.

Janine is neatly dressed but looks tired and older than her years. She is on a pension and 'manages all right' financially. She lives in a unit near the train station and buses but 'they' also have a car which her boyfriend drives. She wishes that she had finished Year 10 and then left if she had a job to go to, but otherwise thinks she might have gone on to Year 12 and 'had her baby at 20'. Now she feels ready to do a course. Her mother would look after the baby and is supportive. Her advice—'don't leave school—people don't think school is worth it but it is!'.

36 Thea

Sex: female

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 5 mixed

Type: 4 discouraged

At risk: yes

Theme: Would have liked to have the School Certificate and then to start work in hairdressing

Trigger: None

The school principal recommended that Thea leave school two weeks before the School Certificate exams so as not to 'waste her time and theirs', although the music teacher and the drama teacher tried to persuade her to stay. Her parents thought it was 'probably better' for her to leave but her friends didn't want her to, although most of the year left soon after the Year 10 exams. Thea really would have liked to have the School Certificate and then to start work in hairdressing, although she also would like to work at anything to do with race courses since she loves horses and knows a lot about them.

She liked most of her subjects and was good at sport, music and drama, but clashed with her English teacher, and says 'she just couldn't stop talking in class'. She feels that some teachers think they are always right when they were not, and she would like students to be able to enter into discussions with teachers and to have a say.

On leaving school she received advice relating to TAFE, apprenticeships and the CES from her year administrator. She later went to the CES to find out about hairdressing and learned that it meant commuting to Sydney, and she felt she was too young to be travelling home late at night. Thea then did what she calls a 'horse course' for the unemployed through the CES but on the advice of her CES case manager she left it to do a 12-week Get Started course which included two weeks hairdressing work experience. This was recommended as being more useful for her. The course gave her skills and confidence and she feels it was very worthwhile and her parents were pleased. She started a coffee shop course but did not find this interesting. Some of her friends were also doing courses but others had had problems since leaving school and her best friend had overdosed.

Thea feels she received too little 'career advice' from the school and relied on her sister to fill her in about the world of work. Through the CES she learned about résumés, job applications and how to present yourself for an interview. She has been successful in getting several part-time jobs. One of these was at a supermarket through the CES, but she was put off after three months because 'there were too many part-time staff'.

She thinks employers want you to be a happy person and to have the relevant skills, like you to have job experience and references but don't seem interested in school results or TAFE or vocational qualifications.

Thea is unemployed on benefits, her mother is on 'compo' and her father works casually. Her parents get very frustrated with her, although her goal is to have a job and she feels that she has to work harder at that process.

37 Nerida

Sex: female

Sample: PT employed

VOCAM: 2 occupation

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Working weekdays after school, she asked to work for longer hours, her employer agreed and she is now permanent part time

Trigger: Prospect of extra shifts

Nerida was very confident and friendly behind the counter of the take-away food outlet where she worked, demonstrating the customer relations skills valued by her employer.

When, at 14 and in Year 9, Nerida decided that she wanted to leave school, her parents didn't like it very much but agreed that she could if she had a job to go to. The assistant school principal thought she should stay at school. Some of her friends were all for her leaving but others thought that it was not the right thing for her to do. Teachers 'pointed' her in the direction of TAFE but gave her no information about courses that were available. Nerida felt that she didn't know how or where to start—it was all so unknown. Not knowing where to start was the main problem.

She had liked maths and English where the teachers were helpful, but was failing science and history where she felt the teachers were unhelpful and only interested in the top students. She described herself as 'very talkative' and her behaviour 'a bit below average'. Her friends were doing different things. Some stayed on until Year 12 and others left as they obtained work.

While still at school Nerida had seen a job advertised in a store for a junior casual. She applied for the job and was successful, working four days a week after school and some weekends. Thinking about leaving school, she told management and asked if she could work longer hours. They agreed and she left school and took extra shifts. She is now permanent part time and has now worked there for two years. She once applied for a full-time job at a supermarket but didn't hear anything—not even an acknowledgement.

Overall, Nerida regrets not having her School Certificate but would like to be a motor mechanic. She plans to seek out TAFE courses and an employer and believes that more information at school on how to get into courses would have been useful. Although her parents would like her to be doing some training, Nerida herself feels that long term she really doesn't know what she needs to do. She feels that there are not enough jobs available; she also feels that she does not have the appropriate skills, qualifications, training and experience to get another job.

The thing that would have helped her most would have been having people listen to her.

38 Josh

Sex: male

Sample: unemployed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Left early to do Year 10 at TAFE, aiming to work eventually in the automotive repair industry

Trigger: Part-time work in panel beating

Josh is a motivated young man, who rode his bike through the rain to get to the interview. About two months into Year 10 he made a 'joint decision' to leave school with his parents, who are both employed. He wanted to go to TAFE to do his Certificate of General Education, because his goal was to work in a panel-beating shop or do similar work with cars, when he finished his TAFE certificate. While at school, Josh was getting some part-time work with a panel-beater through a family friend.

His decision to leave was received positively by the school. While some of his friends stayed at school, others thought that what he was doing was a good idea and also went to TAFE to do the same course. Josh felt the best part of school was seeing his friends, the worst was the way teachers treated students 'as if we were in kindergarten'. He had found TAFE very positive—the teachers were very helpful, treating the students as adults and as friends. There were fewer rules and the general environment was better. Josh says he did well at school but that he tended to finish set work quickly and would start talking. He topped in maths and was also good at science and history but disliked English. He says that school would have been improved by replacing schoolteachers with TAFE teachers.

At school Josh attended a career class in which he received useful information on local employment but he left school before doing any work experience. While he was waiting for his TAFE course he worked with a carpet cleaner, is currently looking for work but unable to get benefits because of his parents' income level. This is difficult for the family as they have loans to pay off and other children to support. His parents try to help, to get work for him through friends and driving him around where any distance is involved.

In addition to his TAFE course he also did a three-month Introduction to Mechanics course at a local community college, a free course from which Josh felt he had learned a lot. He would like to do other courses but transport and fees are a problem. He still has some part-time casual work with a panel beater. He says he has applied for at least 20 jobs including Big W, mechanics, nurseries, and hardware stores, in fact anything that has been advertised in the newspaper or at the CES, which he hasn't found very useful. He can't do any courses as he is not on benefits and all he can do is access jobs on the centre's computer. For some jobs a driver's licence was required.

His goal is to have a good secure job working with cars in an individual business. He would like to do more advanced courses. A couple of his friends have been successful in getting apprenticeships because 'they knew the right people'. Others of his friends are having real problems with this period of their lives because they never were, and are still not, motivated.

39 Dale

Sex:	male
Sample:	unemployed
VOCAM:	1 vocational
Type:	2 opportune
At risk:	no
Theme:	Waiting for entry to the air force, has organised school and work around his goals in life, active and self-motivated person
Trigger:	Left first time to participate in a charity bike ride

Dale appeared confident and older than his years. His parents are divorced. He doesn't see his mother and he has stepbrothers and sisters. His passion is rock climbing which culminated in his becoming a volunteer rock-climbing instructor. He has also worked as a volunteer with a local member of parliament and as a junior supervisor at a blue light disco, and feels that references from such people 'in the real world' are of more value than school references.

He does have his School Certificate but has twice left school early. The first time he was 16 when he left in order to ride a bike from Sydney to Brisbane to raise money for a non-profit film company. The next year the school was not keen to take him back and Dale tried one week of TAFE general education but found it 'too basic'. He then applied to another school where the principal impressed him as someone who 'encouraged individuals towards their own goals'.

His goal is to be in the air force and he is currently awaiting information regarding direct entry for a five-year period of service.

Family contacts in insurance and the defence forces have been influential in his life. He had two weeks work experience at an insurance company where he learned clerical, computer and customer service skills. He has had three part-time jobs; the third was four months at a fast chicken franchise which he left because it was 'real-life slave labour'.

Dale is a very focussed young man who wants to be in control of his life and not reliant on benefits, in part because not being on benefits is looked on positively by employers. He finds SkillShare extremely helpful, describing the staff as friendly, trustful and 'respectful of you as an individual'. Their information is up to date, whereas information from schools is often not. But it is 'who you know that is important to getting information about employment opportunities—a sort of combination of info. from other kids' talk and from adult friends of the family'.

Dale has applied for four to five jobs a week for eight months and has been offered jobs but then lost them when he explained that he was waiting to go into the Air Force. He has found that employers want someone who is prepared to stay long term, is willing to learn, has experience and that most prefer Year 10 as a minimum school qualification.

The only course he has done is a first-aid course which is a defence force requirement.

Dale believes that motivation is the key to finding what you want: 'don't let negativity get to you— you let knock backs run off like "water off a duck's back"'. He has no regrets about leaving school and feels that his time has been better spent in the 'real world'.

40 Melinda

Sex: female

Sample: FT employed

VOCAM: 1 vocational

Type: 1 positive

At risk: no

Theme: Good at school but left when her after-school job as a medical receptionist became full time, wants a nursing career

Trigger: Offer of full-time work in her part-time job

It was Melinda's idea to leave school when she was offered full-time employment as a medical receptionist in the practice where she had been working part time while at school. Her parents were happy that she had a job and she says the school was sad to see her go with teachers encouraging her to change her mind. Although all her friends stayed on to do the HSC they felt positive about her leaving.

Melinda left school after gaining her School Certificate. She is the eldest of a family of two brothers and a sister and a foster brother and sister. Her father is employed; her mother is at home with the family. Melinda says that among her real pleasures are outdoor activities with the family.

She had been happy at school, was very comfortable and thought that the teachers at the school were good. Melinda gained mainly 'Bs' and was good at computer studies and commerce. She also really liked PE and health because of their link to her part-time job as a medical receptionist. She felt she needed neither career nor training advice from school because she knew what she was doing. However, the career advisor did give her details of choices for study in relation to her work and her options for school if she decided to stay on.

Melinda was looking for some income and saw a sign in a shop window for a medical receptionist at a local surgery. She applied, was interviewed and offered the position. She worked four hours after school for four days a week and some time each weekend for nearly two years. She was offered a full-time position as soon as she had finished her exams and has been there for nearly a year. Her current employer expected reasonable typing skills, a friendly personality, the interpersonal skills required to be able to handle difficult and different situations with patients, and the skill to learn quickly.

Her employer suggested she do a course in medical terminology at the local community college. This was one night a week for eight weeks, for which Melinda paid the $100 fee. She found the course very useful to her job although she received no financial reimbursement or other recognition. Melinda doesn't drive so is reliant on buses and the train.

Melinda has no regrets about leaving school and believes the School Certificate 'can get you where you want to go'. Perhaps because she has made a successful transition herself, she has few ideas about what could be done about the problems faced by early leavers, because all her friends are still at school doing the HSC. She likes earning money and enjoys work more than school. Her goal is to go to TAFE to do the HSC and then work as a nurse in a private medical practice.

Appendix 3

School leaver interview schedule

Name of person interviewed ....

Interview date ....

Interviewer ....

Sample category used to select for interview (tick the relevant box)

	Males	Females
FT TAFE		
Apprentice, trainee, TAFE + work		
FT work, no study		
PT work		
Unemployed		

Introduction to the purpose of the project:

The research is being conducted by the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training at the University of Technology, Sydney. Its purpose is to improve our knowledge about school leavers' experiences and the services available to them. The interview is confidential and will cover your experiences at the time of leaving school and after leaving school.

We would like to tape the interview. Only the researchers listed above will listen to the tape, and you will not be identified on the tape or in the research report. Your participation is voluntary and you can stop the interview at any time and still be paid for the interview. You will be paid $20.00 in recognition of your time and contribution to this study. Before we start I would like you to sign a form that indicates that you have consented to the interview.

CONSENT FORM
for young people

I consent to the interview being taped ○ Yes ○ No

I have read and understood this form and I agree to be interviewed for this research. I have been paid $20.00.

Signature:

....

Date: 1997

Studies undertaken by the Research Centre for Vocational Education and Training have been approved by the UTS Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research you may contact the RCVET Research Manager, Ms Delia Mazzina (tel 02 9514 3959) or the UTS Research Ethics Officer, Ms Susanna Davis (tel: 02 9514 1279). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

Introduction

Our project is looking at the experiences of young people who leave school. We are looking at services available to help them access employment, education, training. We are also concerned about how services are working together to provide the best opportunities for young people. We are asking you to help us by answering these questions so that we have more information to inform policy-makers.

What you say will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in the final report.

I'd like to start by checking some personal details with you.

1 Male .... Female ....

2 What country were you born in?
Australia
Overseas (specify)
If Overseas, when did you arrive in Australia (i.e. which year)?.............

3 Do you speak any languages other than English at home? ○ Yes ○ No

4 Are you currently living:
At home with your parents
Other *(probe details)*

5 How old are you? ______________ years

6 What is your date of birth? ______/ ______/ 19_____

7 Can you tell me about what your parents do *(Probe FT work, PT work, unemployed, pension etc.)*

....Mother

....Father

8 What about your brothers and/or sisters? *(Probe FT work, PT work, unemployed, pension, school student, TAFE or university student, FT or PT etc.)*

1 First of all, some questions about your experiences at the time that you left school

1.1 When exactly did you leave school? *(i.e. which month, which school year)*

1.2 How old were you when you left?

1.3 Can you tell me why you left school?

1.4 Whose idea was it? *(Probe)*

- Mine
- My parents
- Teachers suggested it
- Friends
- The school made me (i.e. expelled)

1.5 At the time that you left, how did your parents react to the idea?

1.6 What was the reaction of the school? *(Probe)*
1.6.1 Did any of the teachers try to change your mind?
1.6.2 Did they suggest that you would be better off if you stayed?

1.7 What about your friends? Were most of them staying at school, or did they leave too?

1.8 What did your friends think about your decision to leave?

1.9 What sort of plans did you have when you left school? *(Probe)*
1.9.1 In terms of the sort of job that you wanted:
1.9.2 In terms of the sort of courses that you wanted to do:

1.10 Did the school give you a reference?
1.10.1 If Yes: What did you think of it? Was it a good one that was useful?
1.10.2 If No: Why?

1.11 When you left school, did anyone give you information or help on how to find a job?
1.11.1 If Yes: What sort of information?

1.12 Did anyone give you any information about: *(If **Yes** for any, probe **Who**)*
1.12.1 Courses that you might do? (Y/N)
1.12.2 TAFE (Y/N)
1.12.3 Apprenticeships (Y/N)
1.12.4 Traineeships (Y/N)

If Yes:
1.13 What sort of information did they give you?

If No:
1.14 Would it have made a difference if you had been given this sort of information?
What sort of information would have been helpful?

1.15 In overall terms, what did you think of school? *(Probe)*
1.16 What did you think about:
1.16.1 The teachers
1.16.2 The courses that you studied
1.16.3 The way that it was organised and run
1.16.4 Your friends there

1.17 What was the best part of school?

1.18 What was the worst thing about school?

1.19 What could have made school better?

1.20 How well did you do in your school subjects? Which were your best ones? Which were your worst ones?

1.21 Compared to other students, how would you rate your behaviour at school? Did you get into more trouble than others, or less?

2 I would now like to ask you a few questions about career advice

2.1 Tell me about the career advice that you had during high school? What do you remember about it?

2.2 Did you get the chance to do work experience?

2.3 If you did, what did you think about it? Did you learn anything from it?

2.4 While we are on the subject of work, did you have any part-time jobs while you were at school?
2.4.1 How did you find them/it?
2.4.2 What did you think of them/it?
2.4.3 Did it/they influence your decision to leave school?
2.4.4 Did you learn anything in it/them that has been useful since you left school?

2.5 From your career advice, how much were you told about the sorts of jobs available to school leavers on the Central Coast?

2.6 Were you told about which firms employ school leavers on the Central Coast?

2.7 Were you told about what employers look for when they employ school leavers?

2.8 Were you told about what standards of education employers want for particular jobs?

2.9 What about their requirements in terms of vocational training qualifications?

2.10 Did your careers advice tell you about TAFE and vocational training?

If Yes
2.10.1 What were you told about the sorts of courses available on the Central Coast?
2.10.2 What were you told about the standard of education you would need to get into TAFE courses?

2.11 Did you have anyone from TAFE come to the school and talk to you about TAFE courses as part of your career education at school?

2.12 What about any employers? Did they come and tell you about what is needed by young people that they hire?

2.13 How about apprenticeships and traineeships? Were you told about them?

If Yes

2.13.1 Were you told what sorts of apprenticeships and traineeships are available on the Central Coast?

2.13.2 Were you told what standard of education you need to get an apprenticeship or a traineeship?

2.14 Did the careers advice that you got tell you about what you need to do in order to find a job?

If Yes, were you told about:

2.14.1 Where to go to find one
2.14.2 How to prepare a résumé
2.14.3 How to dress for and behave in a job interview

2.15 Thinking back to the time that you actually left school, did the careers advisor have an interview with you?

If Yes:

2.15.1 What was that about? Did it give you any advice that was useful?

If No:

2.15.2 Would you have liked to have had one? *(Probe why if **Yes**)*

2.16 Have you had any contact with the school or the careers advisor since you left? *(Probe details if **Yes**. Probe reasons if **No**)*

3 I would now like to ask about your experiences since you left school

3.1 When you left school, tell me about what you did straight away—in the first week for example?

3.2 What are you doing now? ***(FT job, PT job, FT course, PT course, looking for work, nothing etc. Probe for full details of all current employment and study/training, in particular for combinations of FT and PT work or study)***

Now I would like you to tell me about what you have done since you left school in the way of work or training.

3a Job-seeking

3.3 First of all, how many jobs have you applied for?

3.4 What sorts of jobs? *(Probe FT/PT)*

If PT not mentioned, *(probe why)*

3.5 Did you:

3.5.1 Have personal interviews

3.5.2 Make phone calls in response to an ad.
3.5.3 Write letters
3.5.4 Fill in application forms
3.5.5 Cold canvas, i.e. just call in to employers to see if they had jobs
3.5.6 Cold canvas by phone, i.e. just ring to see if there were any jobs

3.5a How did you find out about them:
3.5a.1 Referred by a friend or relative
3.5a.2 Referred by the CES
3.5a.3 Newspaper advertisements
3.5a.4 Other

3.6 What do employers say that they are looking for in the way of:
3.6.1 Skills
3.6.2 Experience
3.6.3 References
3.6.4 School results
3.6.5 TAFE or vocational training qualifications
3.6.6 Personal qualities

3.7 What is your feeling about what they are really looking for? For example which of the above *(i.e. 3.6.1– 3.6.6)* do you think that they see as being most important?

3.8 Do employers that you have spoken to place much emphasis on when you left school (i.e. Year 10 vs Year 11 or 12)?

3.9 From your experience, when you are looking for work:
3.9.1 Does it matter when you have left school—for example is it a disadvantage not to have done Year 12, or doesn't it matter?
3.9.2 What about vocational training? Does it matter whether or not you done have any? *(Probe details)*

3.10 Have you used the CES to help you find jobs?

If Yes:
3.10.1 What has been your experience with them? *(Probe)*
3.10.1.1 Sorts of jobs referred to
3.10.1.2 If referred to any courses or training
3.10.1.3 What advice if any has been given

If No:
3.10.2 Why not?

For both Yes and No:
3.10.3 Do you know of any other services on the Central Coast apart from the CES that help school leavers to find work?

If Yes:
Seek details, Probe if has used it/them

3.10.4 Do you know of any other services on the Central Coast that help school leavers to find training?

If Yes:
Seek details, (Probe if has used it/them)

3.11 How would you rate your success in finding work, compared to other young people like you?

3.12 What do you think explains any difference between your outcomes in finding work and other people who left school at about the same time?

3.13 What problems have you experienced in finding work? For example:
- 3.13.1 Too many people applying
- 3.13.2 Not enough jobs available
- 3.13.3 CES not helpful
- 3.13.4 Lack of money
- 3.13.5 Transport to get to interviews, availability and/or cost
- 3.13.6 Health
- 3.13.7 Not having the right skills
- 3.13.8 Not having the qualifications and training needed
- 3.13.9 Lack of experience
- 3.13.10 Cost of clothing
- 3.13.11 Housing
- 3.13.12 Non-experienced

3.14 In overall terms, how much time have you spent looking for work since you left school?

3b Employment history

3.15 Can you tell me about any jobs that you have had, starting with the first one since leaving school, and finishing with the last one that you had (or the one that you have now) *(Probe details of each job, i.e. FT/PT, job title, any training given, what thought of it, how long held it, why left etc.)*

Title	FT/PT	Training?	Reaction	How long held	Why left

3c Vocational training

3.16 Can you tell me about any education or training courses that you have done since you left school, starting with the first one that you did, and working through to any that you might be doing now. This could include courses at TAFE or any other training courses that you might have done that were somewhere else apart from TAFE.
If none, go to 3.17

3.16.1 Course details

(Probe details of courses, i.e. FT/PT, where, name of course, if part of an apprenticeship/traineeship etc., how found out about it, why decided to do it)

Title	FT/PT	Institution	Part of app/T'p?	How found out about it	Why decided to do it
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					

3.16.2 Reactions

(Probe reactions to each course, i.e. if completed, if not why not, how enjoyed it, how useful it was/is)

Completed?	Reasons if no	Enjoyable?	Useful?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			

3.16.3 Problems experienced
(Probe problems experienced with course(s), i.e. study, finance/income support, transport to college, teachers)

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	

Go to 3.18

3.17 If no courses, education or training undertaken:
(Probe details of why not, i.e.:)
3.17.1 Don't know of any courses
3.17.2 Not interested in doing any study
3.17.3 Wouldn't help my job prospects
3.17.4 Too far to travel/travel problems
3.17.5 Costs too much
3.17.6 No idea who offers courses etc.
3.17.7 Don't know what I am interested in

3.18 What are your parents' attitude to you doing courses or training?

3.19 What about your friends? Are any of them doing any courses or training? What do they say about you doing courses?

3.20 Do you know of any organisations apart from TAFE on the Central Coast that offer training or courses to school leavers?

4 Other post-school experiences

4.1 Looking back, what have been the good things about leaving school? What have you enjoyed?

4.2 What have been any bad things about leaving school? Is there anything about it that you regret, or is there anything that you would have done differently?

4.3 What sort of problems, if any, have you had since leaving school? *(Probe, seek details)*
4.3.1 Health
4.3.2 Problems with the police
4.3.3 Problems with income support/not having enough money
4.3.4 Housing/accommodation
4.3.5 Personal problems
4.3.6 Problems with relationships

4.4 If you have had any of these sorts of problems, how if at all have they affected your looking for work?

4.5 How if at all have they affected your taking part in any study, courses or training?

4.6 Thinking now about the future:
  4.6.1 What do you hope to be doing in two years time?
  4.6.2 Do you think that you can achieve this?

5 Summing up

5.1 To sum up, have you needed any of the following since you left school and, if so, have you been given them?

	Needed		**Been given**	
Assistance to return to school	Y	N	Y	N
Information about TAFE	Y	N	Y	N
Information about apprenticeships/traineeships	Y	N	Y	N
Help with finding a job	Y	N	Y	N
Transport to get to jobs or interviews	Y	N	Y	N
Accommodation/housing help	Y	N	Y	N
Legal services	Y	N	Y	N
Health	Y	N	Y	N
Help with study	Y	N	Y	N
Income support/help with money	Y	N	Y	N

5.2 Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your experiences since you left school?

5.3 Do you have any friends who have been really successful since they left school?

If Yes:
What do you think explains why they have been successful?

5.4 Do you have any friends who have had lots of real problems since they left school?

If Yes:
What do you think explains this?

5.5 What advice do you have on ways that things could be improved for school leavers such as yourself to improve their chances of getting work and training?

THANKS VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME

Appendix 4

Employer interview schedule

Name of interviewer______________________________

Name of business______________________________

Contact telephone______________________________

Location of business______________________________

Name of person interviewed______________________________

Position/role of person interviewed______________________________

A Can you tell me first about the nature of your business?

1	(a) What is your main area of business? (b) Total number of employees________________ (c) Have you any trainees or apprentices at present? If Yes how many?________________ *Explore ideas about employing trainees etc.*

B And now, some questions about your views on employing early school leavers.

1	(a) Do you employ early school leavers? If Yes go to question 2 (b) If No is there some reason for this? (detail)
2	(a) When you employ an early school leaver (or consider doing so) what is the MAIN thing you are looking for? *(draw out main constructs)* (b) When we interviewed young people they often told us that employers mainly look for personal qualities. What do you think of this?
3	Do you place much emphasis on the year someone left school? *Prompt: on whether they have gained their School Certificate or their HSC?*

4	(a) Have you experienced any problems employing early school leavers? (b) If Yes what kinds of problems?

C Can I ask you more about actual recruitment and training of early school leavers.

1	When you need to employ an early school leaver, what do you do? *Prompts: e.g.* *(a) ring up the CES/talk to an employment agency* *(b) put notice in window* *(c) ask the local training college* *(d) other*
2	When deciding to employ an early school leaver, whose advice do you value the most? *Prompts: the recommendation of* *(a) an employment agency* *(b) a training college* *(c) family or friends* *(d) school* *(e) written references from past employers*
3	What would make you think of employing a young person as a trainee or apprentice? *Prompts:* *(a) the wage subsidy component* *(b) encouraging someone who was good value* *(c) benefits for the company from the training* *(d) other*
4	(a) Have you registered with local schools as a venue for work experience? (b) Do you ever recruit from work experience students from local schools? (c) If Yes at what level of school experience (Year 10 or higher?)
5	(a) Do you ever participate in career days at school (or at other venues) to present yourself as a potential employer of early school leavers? (b) If Yes in what way have they been successful/unsuccessful

6	(a) Do you know of any available courses that may prepare early school leavers for your particular employment needs? (b) If Yes what course? (a few details) (c) If No what type of course would be needed?
7	What kind of on-the-job training do you provide?
8	(a) Do you feel that your company is different from other employers in the way it approaches the employment and training of early school leavers? (b) If Yes in what way?

D Finally, some questions about improving the transition from school to jobs for early school leavers.

1	(a) Do you know of any other services apart from the CES on the Central Coast that help early school leavers find work? (b) If Yes what are they?
2	Are you on any service providers' lists as a potential employer of early school leavers?
3	(a) In your business have there been particular incidents which illustrate the success or failure of young people's job-seeking? (b) If Yes would you like to mention the employment 'success story' of someone who left school early and got a job? (or alternatively a negative experience?)
4	What do you think needs to happen to improve the employability of early school leavers?
5	What kinds of problems do you feel early school leavers have: (a) in getting work (b) staying in work
6	In your opinion, what could be done to improve the transition from school to jobs for early school leavers and other young people? *Prompts:* *(a) roles of schools* *(b) government* *(c) parents* *(d) other*
7	Are there any other comments you would like to make?

Appendix 5

The provider interview

Provider____

Contact person____________________________________

Position____

Phone____

A Nature of the service

1 [Icebreaker if necessary] Can you tell me something abut the kind of services you provide, your clienteles and funding sources?

2 What is the MAIN CONTACT you have with early school leavers (those who left school at about Year 10)?

3 What SERVICES do you provide for early school leavers (those who left school at about Year 10)?

B Early leavers' needs and problems

1 What are the main NEEDS and PROBLEMS faced by the early school leavers you see?

2 What STRATEGIES have you found to be most EFFECTIVE in helping early school leavers make the TRANSITION to employment or education and training?

3 What do you know of OTHER SERVICES besides yours which provide advice and support to early leavers?

C Early school leaving and transition

*[SERVICE and VET PROVIDERS only]

1 What do you believe are the MAIN REASONS young people leave school at Year 10 or before?

2 From what you know of the needs of early leavers, what are the GAPS in SERVICES available for early leavers?

3 What in your view can local schools do to provide BETTER SUPPORT for early leavers?

*[SCHOOLS only] Early leavers tell us that they received little advice from the school about their options (Prompt: no reference, no package, no interview, no job preparation).

4 What are your VIEWS about what schools do to ASSIST early leavers?

5 What LINKS does the school have to TAFE and other agencies that help early leavers?

6 What should schools be doing to provide BETTER SUPPORT for early leavers?

D Perceptions of leavers' labour market experiences

1 What do you know of early leavers' experiences of work and job-seeking on the Central Coast?
—the kind of work opportunities available
—what employers expect of school leavers

2 How effective are the job-seeking strategies of early leavers?

3 What kinds of employment services are effective in helping early leavers? e.g. CES, other 'contacts'

E Vocational education and training opportunities

1 What vocational education and training opportunities for early leavers are there on the Central Coast? e.g. apprenticeships or traineeships, TAFE courses, CES

2 Do you know of other organisations besides TAFE offering courses for early leavers? e.g. SkillShare, private agencies

3 In your view, are there good links between community agencies/youth services and employment, education and training agencies? e.g. with schools, TAFE

F Recommendations on policy

1 What are the main changes which are needed in government policy regarding early leavers?
—in education areas
—in employment

2 What are the main changes needed in services offered locally to early leavers?

3 Are there other views you would like to express?

Appendix 6

Scandinavian postscript: Weaving safety nets for early leavers

Denmark, Norway and Sweden are all characterised by the existence of active safety nets that make it very hard for those who leave school early without recognised qualifications to avoid active engagement in employment, education or training. Despite different institutional arrangements, there are a number of common features across the three countries' approaches, although the following description draws most heavily upon experience in Denmark and Norway. A close integration of education, employment and welfare policies is a common feature, as is the close co-operation of those who work in each domain with local and community groups. Some key features common to each country include the following.

- Strenuous efforts are made to keep the number of early leavers low. This occurs through offering a diverse and flexible curriculum containing a variety of vocational and general education options capable of meeting the interests and talents of the widest possible range of students, including the poorly motivated and the academically weak.

- Locally managed follow-up services are provided which contact those who do leave school without a qualification, and which contact them very soon after they have left school rather than waiting until they have had a chance to adjust to inactivity or unemployment. In the case of Norway and Sweden these services are managed by the Counties, which also have responsibility for upper secondary education. In Denmark the Municipalities, which roughly correspond to Australian local governments in scale, have the responsibility. To ensure that drop-outs do not fall through the cracks, schools are legally obliged to send the details of drop-outs to the follow-up service, and the follow-up service is obliged to contact them. The young people targetted for more intensive assistance by the follow-up service are those who, having left school without a qualification, are not involved in education and who do not have a job. This encompasses both those who are formally unemployed and those who have withdrawn both from education and from the labour market. Denmark extends the target group to include those who have nothing but insecure or part-time unskilled work, as it is seen to be important for this group not to become locked into work of this sort, but to have the basis for a solid career laid through obtaining an employment qualification.

- Local case management by the follow-up service is provided for each early leaver, based upon the construction of personal action plans which are regularly reviewed.

- A basic goal is set of encouraging each drop-out to re-engage in learning and to return as quickly as possible to mainstream education, in order to obtain a qualification for work or further study. Early insertion into unskilled work through methods such as wage subsidies is not seen as an objective and is not encouraged.

- Low case loads are given to those who act as case managers or mentors. This both ensures that young people receive the extent of assistance that they need, and is made possible because of efforts to keep the number of drop-outs low in the first instance.

- Case managers are offered a wide range of flexible alternatives in education and training, as well as in employment-based programs, that can be adapted to individual young people's needs. Care is also taken that the number of places in such programs is adequate to meet the level of demand.

- Easy pathways back into mainstream schooling from these bridging alternatives are also provided.

- Co-operation is encouraged between case managers or mentors and local health, welfare and community services and the national public employment service.

- Social welfare policies are in place that require young people to be actively engaged in education, training, or job search, and which deny unemployment benefits to those who are not.

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